CORPORAL SAM

AND OTHER STORIES

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BY

"Q"

(A. T. QUILLER-COUCH)



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CORPORAL SAM

I

Sergeant David Wilkes, of the First (Royal) Regiment of Foot—third battalion, B Company—came trudging with a small fatigue party down the sandy slopes of Mount Olia, on the summit of which they had been toiling all day, helping the artillerymen to drag an extra 24-pounder into battery. They had brought it into position just half an hour ago, and already it had opened fire along with another 24-pounder and two howitzers mounted on the same rocky platform. The men as they descended heard the projectiles fly over their heads, and paused, distinguishing the scream of the shells from the dull hum of the round-shot, to watch the effect of the marksmanship, which was excellent.

Northwards, to their right, stretched the blue line of the Bay, where a single ship-of-war tacked lazily and kept a two-miles' offing. The smoke of the guns, drifting down on the land-breeze from the summit of Mount Olia, now hid her white sails, now lifted and revealed them in the late afternoon

sunshine. But although blue held the upper heavens —cloudless blue of July—the sunshine that reached the ship was murky, almost copper-coloured; for it pierced through a cloud of denser smoke that rolled continuously along the western horizon from the burning houses of San Sebastian.

Sergeant Wilkes and his men, halting on the lower slope of the mountain where it fell away in sand-dunes to the estuary of the Urumea, had the whole flank of the fortress in view. Just now, at half-tide, it rose straight out of the water on the farther bank—a low, narrow-necked isthmus that at its seaward end climbed to a cone-shaped rock four hundred feet high, crowned by a small castle. This was the citadel. The town, through which alone it could be taken by force, lay under it, across the neck of the isthmus; and this again was protected on the landward side by a high rampart or curtain, strengthened by a tall bastion in its centre and covered by a regular hornwork pushed out from its front. So much for the extremities, seaward and landward. That flank of the place which it presented to the sandhills across the Urumea was clearly more vulnerable, and yet not easily vulnerable. Deep water and natural rock protected Mount Orgullo, the citadel hill. The sea-wall, for almost half its length, formed but a *fausse braye* for the hornwork towering formidably behind it. Only where it covered the

town, in the space between citadel and hornwork, this wall became a simple rampart; stout indeed and solid and twenty-seven feet high, with two flanking towers for enfilading fire, besides a demi-bastion at the Mount Orgullo end, yet offering the weak spot in the defences.

The British batteries had found and were hammering at it; not the guns upon Mount Olia, which had been hauled thither to dominate those of the citadel, but a dozen 24-pounders disposed, with a line of mortars behind them, on the lower slope above the estuary, where an out-cropping ridge of rock gave firm ground among the sand-dunes. The undulating line of these dunes hid this, the true breaching battery, from view of Sergeant Wilkes and his men, though they had halted within a hundred yards of it, and for at least an hour the guns had been given a rest. Only, at long intervals, one or other of the mortars threw a bomb to clear the breach—already close upon a hundred feet wide—driven between the two flanking towers. It was behind this breach that the town blazed. The smoke, carried down the estuary by the land-breeze, rolled heavily across the middle slopes of Mount Orgullo. But above it the small castle stood up clearly, silhouetted against the western light, and from time to time one of its guns answered the fire from Mount Olia. Save for this and the sound of falling timbers in the town, San Sebastian kept silence.

"Wonder what it feels like?"

Sergeant Wilkes, not catching the meaning of this, turned about slowly. The speaker was a tall young corporal, Sam Vicary by name and by birth a Somerset lad—a curly haired, broad-shouldered fellow with a simple engaging smile. He had come out with one of the later drafts, and nobody knew the cause of his enlisting, but it was supposed to be some poaching trouble at home. At all events, the recruiting sergeant had picked up a bargain in him, for, let alone his stature—and the Royals as a regiment prided themselves on their inches—he was easily the best marksman in B Company. Sergeant Wilkes, on whose recommendation he had been given his corporal's stripe, the day after Vittoria, looked on him as the hopefullest of his youngsters.

"Feels like?" echoed the sergeant, following the young man's gaze and observing that it rested on the great breach. "Oh! 'tis the assault you mean? Well, it feels pretty much like any other part of the business, only your blood's up, and you don't have to keep yourself warm, waiting for the guns to tire. When we stormed the San Vincenty, now, at Badajoz——"

Some one interrupted, with a serio-comic groan.

"You've started him now, Sam Vicary! Johnny-raws of the Third Battalion, your kind attention, pray, for Daddy Wilkes and the good old days when

pipeclay *was* pipeclay. Don't be afraid, for though he took that first-class fortress single-handed, you may sit upon his knee, and he'll tell you all about it."

"It's children you are, anyway," said the sergeant, with a tolerant smile. "But I'll forgive ye, when the time comes, if ye'll do the Royals credit—and, what's more, I'll never cast up that 'twas but a third battalion against a third-class place. Nor will I need to," he added, after a pause, "if the general makes a throw for yon breach before clearing the hornwork."

"I wasn't thinkin' of the assault," explained the young corporal, simply, "but of the women and children. It must be hell for them, this waitin'."

The same voice that had mocked the sergeant put up a ribald guffaw.

"Didn't the general give warning," it asked, "when he summoned the garrison? 'I've got Sam Vicary here along with me,' he said, 'and so I give you notice, for Sam's a terror when he starts to work.'"

"If you fellows could quit foolin' a moment——" began Corporal Sam, with an ingenuous blush. But here on a sudden the slope below them opened with a roar as the breaching battery—gun after gun—renewed its fire on the sea-wall. Amid the din, and while the earth yet shook underfoot, the sergeant was the first to recover himself.

"Another breach!" he shouted between the

explosions, putting up both hands like a pair of spectacles and peering through the smoke. "See there—to the left; and that accounts for their quiet this last hour." He watched the impact of the shot for a minute or so, and shook his head. "They'd do better to clear the hornwork. At Badajoz, now——"

But here he checked himself in time, and fortunately no one had heard him. The men moved on and struck into the rutted track leading from the batteries to camp. He turned and followed them, in a brown study. Ever since Badajoz, siege operations had been Sergeant Wilkes's foible. His youngsters played upon it, drawing him into discussions over the camp-fire, and winking one to another as he expounded and illustrated, using bits of stick to represent parallels, traverses, rampart and glaçis, scarp and counterscarp. But he had mastered something of the theory, after his lights, and our batteries' neglect of the hornwork struck him as unscientific.

As he pursued the path, a few dozen yards in rear of his comrades, at a turn where it doubled a sharp corner he saw their hands go up to the salute, and with this slight warning came upon two of his own officers—Major Frazer and Captain Archimbeau—perched on a knoll to the left, and attentively studying the artillery practice through their glasses. The captain (who, by the way, commanded B Company) signed to him to halt, and climbed down

to him while the fatigue party trudged on. Major Frazer followed, closing his field telescope as he descended.

"What do you say to it?" asked Captain Archimbeau, with a jerk of his hand towards the great breach.

"It can be done, sir," Sergeant Wilkes answered. "Leastways, it ought to be done. But with submission, sir, 'twill be at wicked waste, unless they first clear the hornwork."

"They can keep it pretty well swept while we assault. The fact is," said Major Frazer, a tall Scotsman, speaking in his slow Scots way, "we assault it early to-morrow, and the general has asked me to find volunteers."

"For the forlorn hope, sir?" The sergeant flushed a little, over the compliment paid to the Royals.

Major Frazer nodded. "There's no need to make it common knowledge just yet. I am allowed to pick my men, but I have no wish to spend the night in choosing between volunteers. You understand?"

"Yes, sir. You will get a plenty without travelling outside the regiment."

"Captain Archimbeau goes with us; and we thought, Wilkes, of asking you to join the party."

"You are very good, sir." There was hesitation, though, in the sergeant's manner, and Major Frazer perceived it.

"You understand," he said coldly, "that there is no obligation. I wouldn't press a man for this kind of service, even if I could."

The sergeant flushed. "I was thinkin' of the regiment, sir," he answered, and turned to his captain. "We shall have our men supportin'?—if I may make bold to ask."

"The Royals are to show the way at the great breach, with the 9th in support. The 38th tackle the smaller breach. To make surer (as he says), the general has a mind to strengthen us up in the centre with a picked detachment of the whole division."

Sergeant Wilkes shook his head. "I am sorry for that, sir. 'Tisn't for me to teach the general; but I misdoubt all mixin' up of regiments. What the Royals can do they can best do by themselves."

"Hurts your pride a bit, eh, sergeant?" asked the major, with a short laugh. "And yet, my friend, it was only yesterday I overheard you telling your company they weren't fit to carry the slops of the Fifth Division."

"It does 'em good, sir. A man, if he wants to do good, must say a trifle more than he means, at times."

"You *can* trust 'em, then?"

"And that again, sir—savin' your presence—would be sayin' more than I mean. For the lads, sir, are young lads, though willing enough; and young lads need to be nursed, however willing. As between you

and me, sir"—here he appealed to Captain Archimbeau—"B Company is the steadiest in the battalion. But if the major takes away its captain, and upon top of him its senior sergeant—well, beggin' your pardon, a compliment's a compliment, but it may be bought too dear."

"Wilkes is right," said the major, after a pause. "To take the both of you would be risky; and unless I'm mistaken, Archimbeau, he thinks you will be the easier spared."

"I haven't a doubt he does," agreed Captain Archimbeau, laughing.

"But I do not, sir." The sergeant seemed on the point to say more, but checked himself.

"Well?"

"It's not for me to give an opinion, sir, unless asked for it."

"I ask for it then—your plain opinion, as a soldier."

"An officer's an officer—that's my opinion. There's good and bad, to be sure; but an officer like the captain here, that the men can trust, is harder spared than any sergeant: let alone that you can easily spread officers too thick—even good ones, and even in a forlorn hope."

"He wants my place," said Captain Archimbeau; "and he salves my feelings with a testimonial."

"As for that, sir"—the sergeant conceded a grin

—"I reckon you won't be far behind us when the trouble begins. And if the major wants a good man from B Company, you'll agree with me, sir, that yonder he goes." And Sergeant Wilkes jerked a thumb after the tall young corporal, a moment before the sand-hills hid his retreating figure.

II

THE assault had been a muddle from the start.

To begin with, after being ordered for one day (July 23rd) it had been deferred to the next; on reasonable grounds, indeed, for the town immediately behind the great breach was burning like a furnace; but it gave the troops an uneasy feeling that their leaders were distracted in counsel. Nor, divided by the river, did the artillery and the stormers work upon a mutual understanding. The heavy cannon, after a short experiment to the left of the great breach, had shifted their fire to the right of it, and had succeeded in knocking a practicable hole in it before dusk. But either this change of plan had not been reported to the trenches, or the officer directing the assault inexplicably failed to adapt his dispositions to it. The troops for the great breach were filed out ahead of the 38th, which had further to go.

Worst of all, they were set in motion an hour before dawn, although Wellington had left orders

that fair daylight should be waited for, and the artillerymen across the Urumea were still plying their guns on the sea-wall, to dissuade the besieged from repairing it in the darkness. To be sure a signal for the assault—the firing of a mine against the horn-work—had been concerted, and was duly given; but in the din and the darkness it was either not heard or not understood.

Thus it happened that the forlorn hope and the supporting companies of the Royals had no sooner cleared the trenches than their ranks shook under a fire of grape, and from our own guns. There was no cure but to dash through it and take the chances, and Major Frazer, waving his sword, called on his men to follow him at the double. Ahead of them, along the foot of the seawall, the receding tide had left a strip of strand, foul with rock and rock pools and patches of sea-weed, dark and slippery. Now and again a shell burst and illuminated these patches, or the still-dripping ooze twinkled under flashes of musketry from the wall above; for the defenders had hurried to the parapet and flanking towers, and their fire already crackled the whole length of the strand.

Sergeant Wilkes, running a pace or two behind the major, slipping and staggering at every second yard, was aware—though he could not see him—of young Corporal Sam close at his shoulder. The lad talked to himself as he ran: but his talk was no more

than a babble of quiet unmeaning curses, and the sergeant, who understood how the lust of fighting works in different men, did not trouble to answer until, himself floundering up to his knees in a salt-water pool, he flung out a hand for support and felt it gripped.

"Damn them!" The corporal, dragging him to solid foothold, cast a look up as a shell burst high overhead, and his face showed white with passion in the glare of it. "Can't any one *tell* them there's no sense in it!"

"Take it easy, lad," panted the sergeant, cheerfully. "They're bound to understand in a minute, hearin' all this musketry. Accidents will happen—and anyway they can't help seein' us at the breach. Look at the light of it beyond the tower there!"

They floundered on together. The tower, not fifty yards away, jetted fire from every loophole; but its marksmen were aiming into the darkness, having been caught in a hurry and before they could throw down flares. As the sergeant rushed to get close under the wall of it, a bullet sent his shako whizzing; but still he ran on, and came bareheaded to the foot of the breach.

It ran down to the foreshore, a broadening scree of rubble, ruined masonry, broken beams of timber—some of them smouldering; and over the top of it shone the blaze of the town. But the actual gap

appeared to be undefended, and, better still, the rubbish on the near side had so piled itself that for half the way up the stormers could climb under cover, protected from the enfilading fire. Already the major had dropped on hands and knees and was leading the way up, scrambling from heap to heap of rubbish. Close after him went an officer in the uniform of the Engineers, with Corporal Sam at his heels. The sergeant ducked his head and followed, dodging from block to block of masonry on the other side of which the bullets spattered.

"Forward! Forward the Royals!"

The leaders were shouting it, and he passed on the shout. As yet, not a man had fallen on the slope of the breach. Two, more agile than he because by some years younger, overtook and passed him; but he was the sixth to reach the summit, and might reckon this very good work for a man of his weight. Then, as he turned to shout again, three more of the forlorn hope came blundering up, and the nine stood unscathed on the summit of the gap and apparently with none to oppose them.

But beyond it—between them and the town, and a sheer twenty feet below them, lay a pool of blazing tar, the flames of which roared up against their faces.

"Forward the Royals! Ladders—ladders! Oh, for your life, forward with the ladders!"

The major started the cry. Corporal Sam, taking

it up, screamed it again and again. In the darkness, behind and below, the sergeant heard Captain Archimbeau calling to his men to hurry. One ladder-bearer came clattering up; but the ladders were in six-foot lengths, and a single length was useless. Nevertheless, in his rage of haste, Corporal Sam seized it from the man, and was bending to clamp it over the pit, when from the parapet to the right a sudden cross-fire swept the head of the breach. A bullet struck him in the hand. He looked up, with the pain of it, in time to see Major Frazer spin about, topple past the sergeant's hand thrust out to steady him, and pitch headlong down the slope. The ladder-bearer and another tall Royal dropped at the same moment.

"Hi, sergeant!" spoke up the young Engineer officer very sharply and clearly, at the same time stepping a couple of paces down from the ridge over which a frontal fire of bullets now flew whistling from the loopholed houses in the town. "For God's sake, shout and hurry up your men, or our chance this night is gone."

"I know it, sir—I know it," groaned Wilkes.

"Then shout, man! Fifty men might do it yet, but every moment is odds against. See the swarm on the rampart there, to the right!"

They shouted together, but in vain. Four or five ladder-bearers mounted the slope, but only to be shot

down almost at their feet. The Engineer officer, reaching forward to seize one of the ladder-lengths and drag it behind a pile of masonry under which he had taken cover, and thus for an instant exposing himself, dropped suddenly upon his face. And now but Sergeant Wilkes and Corporal Sam were left clinging, waiting for the help that still tarried.

What had happened was this. The supporting columns, disordered by the scramble along the foreshore, arrived at the foot of the breach in straggling two's and three's; and here, while their officers tried to form them up, the young soldiers behind, left for the moment without commanders and exasperated by the fire from the flanking tower, halted to exchange useless shots with its defenders and with the enemy on the rampart. Such fighting was worse than idle: it delayed them full in the path of the 38th, which now overtook them on its way to the lesser breach, and in five minutes the two columns were inextricably mixed, blocking the narrow space between wall and river, and exposed in all this dark confusion to a murderous fire.

At length, and though less than a third of his men followed him, Captain Archimbeau led the supporters up the breach; but by this time the enemy had packed the ramparts on either side. No soldiery could stand the hail of musketry, grape, and hand-grenades that rained upon the head of the column.

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It hesitated, pushed forward again, and broke some fifteen feet from the summit, like a spent wave. Then, as the Royals came pouring back, Lieutenant Campbell of the 9th, with all that could be collected of his picked detachment, forced his way up through the sheer weight of them, won clear, and made a fling for the crest. In vain! His first rush carried him abreast of the masonry under which Sergeant Wilkes and the corporal clung for cover. They rushed out to join him; but they had scarcely gained his side before the whole detachment began to give ground. It was not that the men fell back; rather, the apex of the column withered down as man after man dropped beside its leader. He himself had taken a wound. Yet he waved his sword and carried them forward on a second charge, only to reach where he had reached before, and be laid there by a second bullet.

Meanwhile the Royals, driven to the foot of the slope, were flung as a fresh obstacle in the path of the 38th still striving to press on for the lesser breach. From his perch halfway up the ruins, Sergeant Wilkes descried Captain Archimbeau endeavouring to rally them, and climbed down to help him. The corporal followed, nursing his wounded hand. As they reached him a bugle sounded the recall.

The assault had failed. At the foot of the breach

a soldier of the 4th Regiment, mad with rage, foamed out a curse upon the Royals. Corporal Sam lifted his bleeding fist and struck him across the mouth. The sergeant dragged the two apart, slipped an arm under his comrade's, and led him away as one leads a child. A moment later the surge of the retreating crowd had almost carried them off their feet. But the sergeant kept a tight hold, and steered his friend back every yard of the way along the bullet-swept foreshore. They were less than halfway across when the dawn broke; and looking in his face he saw that the lad was crying silently—the powder-grime on his cheeks streaked and channelled with tears.

III

"I DON'T understand ye, lad," said Sergeant Wilkes.

"Fast enough you'd understand, if you'd but look me in the face," answered Corporal Sam, digging his heel into the sand.

The two men lay supine on a cushion of coarse grass; the sergeant smoking and staring up at the sky, the corporal, with his sound hand clasping his wounded one behind his head, his gaze fixed gloomily between his knees and across the dunes, on the still unrepaired breach in San Sebastian.

A whole fortnight had dragged by since the

assault: a fortnight of idleness for the troops, embittered almost intolerably by a sense that the Fifth Division had disgraced itself. One regiment blamed another, and all conspired to curse the artillery—whose practice, by the way, had been brilliant throughout the siege. Nor did the gunners fail to retort; but they were in luckier case, being kept busy all the while, first in shifting their batteries and removing their worst guns to the ships, next in hauling and placing the new train that arrived piece-meal from England; and not only busy, but alert, on the watch against sorties. Also, and although the error of cannonading the columns of assault had never been cleared up, the brunt of Wellington's displeasure had fallen on the stormers. The Marquis ever laid stress on his infantry, whether to use them or blame them; and when he found occasion to blame, he had words—and methods—that scarified equally the general of division and the private soldier.

"Fast enough you understand," repeated Corporal Sam, savagely.

"I do, then, and I don't," admitted Sergeant Wilkes, after a pause. The lad puzzled him; gave him few confidences, asked for none at all, and certainly was no cheerful companion; and yet during these days of humiliation the two had become friends, almost inseparable. "I've read it," the sergeant pursued, "in Scripture or somewhere, that a man what

keeps a hold on himself does better than if he took a city. I don't say as I understand that altogether; but it *sounds* right."

"Plucky lot of cities we take, in the Royals," growled Corporal Sam. He nodded, as well as his posture allowed, towards San Sebastian. "And you call that a third-class fortress!"

"Accidents will happen." Sergeant Wilkes, puffing at his pipe, fell back philosophically on his old catch-word. "It takes you hard, because you're young; and it takes you harder because you had fed yourself up on dreams o' glory, and such-like."

"Well?"

"Well, and you have to get over it, that's all. A man can't properly call himself a soldier till he's learnt to get over it."

"If that's all, the battalion is qualifyin' fast!" Corporal Sam retorted bitterly, and sat up, blinking in the strong sunlight. Then, as Sergeant Wilkes made no reply, or perhaps because he guessed something in Sergeant Wilkes's averted face, a sudden compunction seized him. "You feel it too?"

"I got to, after all my trouble," answered Sergeant Wilkes, brusquely.

"I'm sorry. Look here—I wish you'd turn your face about—it's worse for you and yet you get over it, as you say. How the devil do you manage?"

Still for a while Sergeant Wilkes leaned back

without making reply. But of a sudden he, too, sat upright, drew down the peak of his shako to shade his eyes, and drawing his pipe from his mouth, jerked the stem of it to indicate a figure slowly crossing a rise of the sandhills between them and the estuary.

"You see that man?"

"To be sure I do. An officer, and in the R.A.—curse them!—though I can't call to mind the cut of his jib."

"You wouldn't. His name's Ramsay, and he's just out of arrest."

"What has he done?"

"A many things, first and last. At Fuentes d'Onoro the whole French cavalry cut him off—him and his battery—and he charged back clean through them; ay, lad, through 'em like a swathe, with his horses belly-down and the guns behind 'em bounding like skipjacks; not a gun taken, and scarce a gunner hurt. That's the sort of man."

"Why has he been under arrest?"

"Because the Marquis gave him an order and forgot it. And because coming up later, expecting to find him where he wasn't and had no right to be, the Marquis lost his temper. And likewise because, when a great man loses his temper, right or wrong don't matter much. So there goes Captain Ramsay broken; a gentleman and a born fighter; and a

captain he'll die. That's how the mills grind in this here all-conquering army. And the likes of us sit here and complain."

"If a man did that wrong to me——" Corporal Sam jumped to his feet and stared after the slight figure moving alone across the sandhills.

Had his curiosity led him but a few paces further, he had seen a strange sight indeed.

Captain Norman Ramsay, wandering alone and with a burning heart, halted suddenly on the edge of a sand-pit. Below him four men stood, gathered in a knot—two of them artillery officers, the others officers of the line. His first impulse was to turn and escape, for he shunned all companionship just now. But a second glance told him what was happening; and, prompt on the understanding, he plunged straight down the sandy bank, walked up to a young artillery officer and took the pistol out of his hand. That was all, and it all happened in less than three minutes. The would-be duellist—and challenges had been common since the late assault—knew the man and his story. For that matter, every one in the army knew his story.

As a ghost he awed them. For a moment he stood looking from one to the other, and so, drawing the charge, tossed the pistol back at its owner's feet and resumed his way.

Corporal Sam, who had merely seen the slight

figure pass beyond the edge of the dunes, went back and flung himself again on the warm bank.

"If a man did that wrong to me—— " he repeated.

IV

CERTAINLY, just or unjust, the Marquis could make himself infernally unpleasant. Having ridden over from headquarters and settled the plans for the new assault, he returned to his main army and there demanded fifty volunteers from each of the fifteen regiments composing the First, Fourth, and Light Divisions—men (as he put it) *who could show other troops how to mount a breach.* It may be guessed with what stomach the Fifth Division digested this; and among them not a man was angrier than their old general, Leith, who now, after a luckless absence, resumed command. The Fifth Division, he swore, could hold their own with any soldiers in the Peninsula. He was furious with the seven hundred and fifty volunteers, and, evading the Marquis's order, which was implicit rather than direct, he added an oath that these interlopers should never lead his men to the breaches.

Rage begets rage. During the misty morning hours of August 31st, the day fixed for the assault, these volunteers, held back and chafing with the reserves, could scarcely be restrained from breaking

out of the trenches. "Why," they demanded, "had they been fetched here if not to show the way?"—a question for which their officers were in no mood to provide a soft answer.

Yet their turn came. Sergeant Wilkes, that amateur in siege-operations, had rightly prophesied from the first that the waste of life at the breaches would be wicked and useless until the hornwork had been silenced and some lodgment made there. So as the morning wore on, and the sea-mists gave place to burning sunshine, and this again to heavy thunder-clouds collected by the unceasing cannonade, still more and more of the reserves of the Fifth Division were pushed up, until none but the volunteers and a handful of the 9th Regiment remained in the trenches. Them, too, at length Leith was forced to unleash, and they swept forward on the breaches yelling like a pack of hounds; but on the crest-line they fared at first no better than the regiments they had taunted. Thrice and four times they reached it only to topple back. The general, watching the fight from the batteries across the Urumea, now directed the gunners to fire over the stormers' heads; and again a cry went up that our men were being slaughtered by their own artillery. Undismayed by this, with no recollections of the first assault to daunt them, a company of the Light Division took advantage of the fire to force their way over the rampart on

the right of the great breach and seize a lodgment in some ruined houses actually within the town. There for an hour or so these brave men were cut off, for the assault in general made no headway.

It must have failed, even after five hours' fighting, but for an accident. A line of powder-barrels collected behind the traverses by the great breach took fire and blew up, driving back all the French grenadiers but the nearest, whom it scattered in mangled heaps. As explosion followed explosion, the bright flame spread and ran along the high curtain. The British leapt after it, breaking through the traverse and swarming up to the curtain's summit. Almost at the same moment the Thirteenth and Twenty-fourth Portuguese, who had crossed the river by a lower ford, hurled themselves over the lesser breach to the right; and as the swollen heavens burst in a storm of rain and thunder, from this point and that the besiegers, as over the lip of a dam, swept down into the streets.

"Treat men like dogs, and they'll behave like dogs," grumbled Sergeant Wilkes, as he followed to prevent what mischief he might. But this, he well knew, would be little enough.

V

CORPORAL SAM VICARY, coming up to the edge of the camp-fire's light, stood there for a moment with a white face. The cause of it—though it would have been a sufficient one—was not the story to which the men around the fire had been listening; for the teller, at sight of the corporal, had broken off abruptly, knowing him to be a religious fellow after a fashion, with a capacity for disapproval and a pair of fists to back it up. So, while his comrades guffawed, he rather cleverly changed the subject.

"Oh, and by the way, talkin' of the convent"—he meant the Convent of Santa Teresa, a high building under the very slope of the citadel, protected by its guns and still held by the enemy, after three days' fighting—"do any of you know a small house to the left of it, with only a strip of garden between? Sort of a mud-nest it is, like a swallow's, stuck under overhang o' the cliff. No? Well, that's a pity, for I hear tell the general has promised five pounds to the first man who breaks into that house."

"But why, at all?" inquired a man close on his right.

"I know the place," put in another; "a mean kind of building, with one window lookin' down the street, and that on the second floor, as you might

say. It don't look to me the sort of house to hold five pounds' worth, all told—let be that, to force it, a man must cross half the fire from the convent, and in full view. Five pounds be *damned!* Five pounds isn't so scarce in these times that a man need go there to fetch it for his widow."

The corporal was turning away. For three days San Sebastian had been a hell, between the flames of which he had seen things that sickened his soul. They sickened it yet, only in remembrance. Yes, and the sickness had more than once come nigh to be physical. His throat worked at the talk of loot, now that he knew what men did for it.

"The general ain't after the furnitcher," answered the first speaker. "It consarns a child."

"A child ain't no such rarity in San Sebastian that anybody need offer five pounds for one."

"What's this talk about a child?" asked Sergeant Wilkes, coming in from his rounds, and dropping to a seat by the blaze. He caught sight of Corporal Sam standing a little way back, and nodded.

"Well, it seems that, barring this child, every soul in the house has been killed. The place is pretty certain death to approach, and the crittur, for all that's known, has been left without food for two days and more. 'Tis a boy, I'm told—a small thing, not above four at the most. Between whiles it runs to the window and looks out. The sentries have seen

it more'n a dozen times; and one told me he'd a sight sooner look on a ghost."

"Then why don't the Frenchies help?" some one demanded. "There's a plenty of 'em close by, in the convent."

"The convent don't count. There's a garden between it and the house, and on the convent side a blank wall—no windows at all, only loopholes. Besides which, there's a whole block of buildings in full blaze t'other side of the house, and the smoke of it drives across so that 'tis only between whiles you can see the child at all. The odds are, he'll be burnt alive or smothered before he starves outright; and, I reckon, put one against the other, 'twill be the mercifuller end."

"Poor little beggar," said the sergeant. "But why don't the general send in a white flag, and take him off?"

"A lot the governor would believe—and after what you and me have seen these two days! A nice tender-hearted crew to tell him, 'If you please, we've come for a poor little three-year-old.' Why, he'd as lief as not believe we meant to *cat* him."

Sergeant Wilkes glanced up across the camp-fire to the spot where Corporal Sam had been standing. But Corporal Sam had disappeared.

VI

ALTHOUGH the hour was close upon midnight, and no moon showed, Corporal Sam needed no lantern to light him through San Sebastian; for a great part of the upper town still burned fiercely, and from time to time a shell, soaring aloft from the mortar batteries across the river, burst over the citadel or against the rocks where the French yet clung, and each explosion flung a glare across the heavens.

He had passed into the town unchallenged. The fatigue parties, hunting by twos and threes among the ruins of the river-front for corpses to burn or bury, doubtless supposed him to be about the same business. At any rate, they paid him no attention.

Just within the walls, where the conflagration had burnt itself out, there were patches of black shadow to be crossed carefully. The fighting had been obstinate here, and more than one blazing house had collapsed into the thick of it. The corporal picked his way gingerly, shivering a little at the thought of some things buried, or half-buried, among the loose stones. Indeed, at the head of the first street his foot entangled itself in something soft. It turned out to be nothing more than a man's cloak, or *poncho*, and he slipped it on, to hide his uniform and avoid explanations should he fall in with one of the patrols; but the feel of it gave him a scare for a moment.

The lad, in fact, was sick of fighting and slaughter —physically ill at the remembrance and thought of them. The rage of the assault had burnt its way through him like a fever and left him weak, giddy, queasy of stomach. He had always hated the sight of suffering, even the suffering of dumb animals: and as a sportsman, home in England, he had learnt to kill his game clean, were it beast or bird. In thought, he had always loathed the trade of a butcher, and had certainly never guessed that soldiering could be—as here in San Sebastian he had seen it—more bestial than the shambles.

For some reason, as he picked his road, his mind wandered away from the reek and stink of San Sebastian and back to England, back to Somerset, to the slopes of Mendip. His home there had overlooked an ancient battlefield, and as a boy, tending the sheep on the uplands, he had conned it often and curiously, having heard the old men tell tales of it. The battle had been fought on a wide plain intersected by many water-dykes. Twice or thrice he had taken a holiday to explore it, half expecting that a close view would tell him something of its history; but, having no books to help him, he had brought back very little beyond a sense of awe that so tremendous a thing had happened just there, and (unconsciously) a stored remembrance of the scents blown across the level from the flowers that lined the dykes—scents of mint and

meadowsweet at home there, as the hawthorn was at home on the hills above.

He smelt them now, across the reek of San Sebastian, and they wafted him back to England—to boyhood, dreaming of war but innocent of its crimes—to long thoughts, long summer days spent among the unheeding sheep, his dog Rover beside him—an almost thoroughbred collie, and a good dog, too, though his end had been tragic. . . . But why on earth should his thoughts be running on Rover just now?

Yet, and although, as he went, England was nearer to him and more real than the smoking heaps between which he picked his way, he steered all the while towards the upper town, through the square, and up the hill overlooked by the convent and the rocky base of the citadel. He knew the exact position of the house, and he chose a narrow street—uninhabited now, and devastated by fire—that led directly to it.

The house was untouched by fire as yet, though another to the left of it blazed furiously. It clung, as it were a swallow's nest, to the face of the cliff. A garden wall ran under the front; and, parallel with the wall, a road pretty constantly swept by musketry fire from the convent. At the head of the street Corporal Sam stumbled against a rifleman who, sheltered from bullets at the angle of the crossing, stood calmly watching the conflagration.

"Hullo!" said the rifleman, cheerfully; "I wanted some more audience, and you're just in time."

"There's a child in the house, eh?" panted Corporal Sam, who had come up the street at a run.

The rifleman nodded. "Poor little devil! He'll soon be out of his pain, though."

"Why, there's heaps of time! The fire won't take hold for another half-hour. What's the best way in? . . . You an' me can go shares, if that's what you're hangin' back for," added Corporal Sam, seeing that the man eyed him without stirring.

"Hi! Bill!" the rifleman whistled to a comrade, who came slouching out of a doorway close by, with a clock in one hand, and in the other a lantern by help of which he had been examining the inside of this piece of plunder. "Here's a boiled lobster in a old woman's cloak, wants to teach us the way into the house yonder."

"Tell him to go home," said Bill, still peering into the works of the clock. "Tell him we've *been* there." He chuckled a moment, looked up, and addressed himself to Corporal Sam. "What regiment?"

"The Royals."

The two burst out laughing, scornfully. "Don't wonder you cover it up," said the first rifleman.

Corporal Sam pulled off his *poncho*. "I'd offer to fight the both of you," he said, "but 'tis time wasted

with a couple of white-livers that don't dare fetch a poor child across a roadway. Let me go by; *you*'ll keep, anyway."

"Now look here, sonny——" The first rifleman blocked his road. "I don't bear no malice for a word spoken in anger: so stand quiet and take my advice. That house isn't goin' to take fire. 'Cos why? 'Cos, as Bill says, we've *been* there—there and in the next house, now burnin'—and we know. 'Cos before leavin' —the night before last it was—some of our boys set two barrels o' powder somewheres in the next house, on the ground floor, *with* a slow match. That's why *we* left; though, as it happened, the match missed fire. But the powder's there, and if you'll wait a few minutes now you'll not be disapp'inted."

"You left the child behind!"

"Well, we left in a hurry, as I tell you, and somehow in the hurry nobody brought him along. I'm sorry for the poor little devil, too." The fellow swung about. "See him there at the window, now! If you want him put out of his pain——"

He lifted his rifle. Corporal Sam made a clutch at his arm to drag it down, and in the scuffle both men swayed out upon the roadway. And with that, or a moment later, he felt the rifleman slip down between his arms, and saw the blood gush from his mouth as he collapsed on the cobbles.

Corporal Sam heard the man Bill shout a furious

oath, cast one puzzled look up the roadway towards the convent, saw the flashes jetting from its high wall, and raced across unscathed. A bullet sang past his ear as he found the gate and hurled himself into the garden. It was almost dark here, but dark only for a moment. . . . For as he caught sight of a flight of steps leading to a narrow doorway, and ran for them —and even as he set foot on the lowest—of a sudden the earth heaved under him, seemed to catch him up in a sheet of flame, and flung him backwards—backwards and flat on his back, into a clump of laurels.

Slowly he picked himself up. The sky was dark now; but, marvellous to say, the house stood. The mass of it yet loomed over the laurels. Yes, and a light showed under the door at the head of the steps. He groped his way up and pushed the door open.

The light came through a rent in the opposite wall, and on the edge of this jagged hole some thin laths were just bursting into a blaze. He rushed across the room to beat out the flame, and this was easily done; but, as he did it, he caught sight of a woman's body, stretched along the floor by the fireplace, and of a child cowering in the corner, watching him.

"Come and help, little one," said Corporal Sam, still beating at the laths.

The child understood no English, and moreover was too small to help. But it seemed that the

corporal's voice emboldened him, for he drew near and stood watching.

"Who did *this*, little one?" asked Corporal Sam, nodding toward the corpse, as he rubbed the charred dust from his hands.

For a while the child stared at him, not comprehending; but by-and-by pointed beneath the table and then back at its mother.

The corporal walked to the table, stooped, and drew from under it a rifle and a pouch half filled with cartridges.

"Tell him we've *been* there." He seemed to hear the rifleman Bill's voice repeating the words, close at hand. He recognized the badge on the pouch.

He was shaking where he stood; and this, perhaps, was why the child stared at him so oddly. But, looking into the wondering young eyes, he read only the question, "What are you going to do?"

He hated these riflemen. Nay, looking around the room, how he hated all the foul forces that had made this room what it was! . . . And yet, on the edge of resolve, he knew that he must die for what he meant to do . . . that the thing was unpardonable, that in the end he must be shot down, and rightly, as a dog.

He remembered his dog Rover, how the poor brute had been tempted to sheep-killing, at night, on the sly; and the look in his eyes when, detected at length,

he had crawled forward to his master to be shot. No other sentence was possible, and Rover had known it.

Had he no better excuse? Perhaps not. . . . He only knew that he could not help it; that this thing had been done, and by the consent of many . . . and that as a man he must kill for it, though as a soldier he deserved only to be killed.

With the child's eyes still resting on him in wonder, he set the rifle on its butt and rammed down a cartridge; and so, dropping on hands and knees, crept to the window.

VII

EARLY next morning Sergeant Wilkes picked his way across the ruins of the great breach and into the town, keeping well to windward of the fatigue parties already kindling fires and collecting the dead bodies that remained unburied.

Within and along the sea-wall San Sebastian was a heap of burnt-out ruins. Amid the stones and rubble encumbering the streets, lay broken muskets, wrenched doors, shattered sticks of furniture—mirrors, hangings, women's apparel, children's clothes—loot dropped by the pillagers as valueless, wreckage of the flood. He passed a very few inhabitants, and these said nothing to him; indeed, did not appear to see him, but sat by the ruins of their houses with faces

set in a stupid horror. Even the crash of a falling house near by would scarcely persuade them to stir, and hundreds during the last three days had been overwhelmed thus and buried.

The sergeant had grown callous to these sights. He walked on, heeding scarcely more than he was heeded, came to the great square, and climbed a street leading northwards, a little to the left of the great convent. The street was a narrow one, for half its length lined on both sides with fire-gutted houses; but the upper half, though deserted, appeared to be almost intact. At the very head, and close under the citadel walls, it took a sharp twist to the right, and another twist, almost equally sharp, to the left before it ended in a broader thoroughfare, crossing it at right angles and running parallel with the ramparts.

At the second twist the sergeant came to a halt; for at his feet, stretched across the causeway, lay a dead body.

He drew back with a start, and looked about him. Corporal Sam had been missing since nine o'clock last night, and he felt sure that Corporal Sam must be here or hereabouts. But no living soul was in sight.

The body at his feet was that of a rifleman; one of the volunteers whose presence had been so unwelcome to General Leith and the whole Fifth Division. The dead fist clutched its rifle; and the sergeant

stooping to disengage this, felt that the body was warm.

"Come back, you silly fool!"

He turned quickly. Another rifleman had thrust his head out of a doorway close by. The sergeant, snatching up the weapon, sprang and joined him in the passage where he sheltered.

"I—I was looking for a friend, hereabouts."

"Fat lot of friend you'll find at the head of *this* street!" snarled the rifleman, and jerked his thumb towards the corpse. "That makes the third already this morning. These Johnnies ain't no sense of honour left—firing on outposts as you may call it."

"Where are they firing from?"

"No 'they' about it. You saw that cottage—or didn't you?—right above there, under the wall; the place with one window in it? There's a devil behind it somewheres; he fires from the back of the room, and what's more, he never misses his man. You have Nick's own luck—the pretty target you made, too; that is unless, like some that call themselves Englishmen and ought to know better, he's a special spite on the Rifles."

The sergeant paid no heed to the sneer. He was beginning to think.

"How long has this been going on?" he asked.

"Only since daylight. There was a child, up yonder, last night; but it stands to reason a child

can't be doing this. He never misses, I tell you. Oh, you had luck, just now!"

"I wonder," said Sergeant Wilkes, musing. "I'll try it again, anyway." And while the rifleman gasped he stepped out boldly into the road.

He knew that his guess might, likely enough, be wrong: that, even were it right, the next two seconds might see him a dead man. Yet he was bound to satisfy himself. With his eyes on the sinister window —it stood half open and faced straight down the narrow street,—he knelt by the corpse, found its ammunition pouch, unbuckled the strap and drew out a handful of cartridges. Then he straightened himself steadily— but his heart was beating hard—and as steadily walked back and rejoined the rifleman in the passage.

"You have a nerve," said the rifleman, his voice shaking a little. "Looks like he don't fire on redcoats; but you have a nerve all the same."

"Or else he may be gone," suggested the sergeant, and on the instant corrected himself; "but I warn you not to reckon upon that. Is there a window facing on him anywhere, round the bend of the street?"

"I dunno."

The rifleman peered forth, turning his head sideways for a cautious reconnoitre. "Maybe he *has* gone, after all——"

It was but his head he exposed beyond the angle of the doorway; and yet, on the instant a report

cracked out sharply, and he pitched forward into the causeway. His own rifle clattered on the stones beside him, and where he fell he lay, like a stone.

Sergeant Wilkes turned with a set jaw and mounted the stairs of the deserted house behind him. They led him up to the roof, and there he dropped on his belly and crawled. Across three roofs he crawled, and lay down behind a balustrade overlooking the transverse roadway. Between the pillars of the balustrade he looked right across the roadway and into the half-open window of the cottage. The room within was dark, save for the glimmer of a mirror on the back wall.

"Kill him I must," growled the sergeant through his teeth, "though I wait the day for it."

And he waited there, crouching, for an hour—for two hours.

He was shifting his cramped attitude a little—a very little—for about the twentieth time, when a smur of colour showed on the mirror, and the next instant passed into a dark shadow. It may be that the marksman within the cottage had spied yet another rifleman in the street. But the sergeant had noted the reflection in the glass, that it was red. Two shots rang out together. But the sergeant, after peering through the parapet, stood upright, walked back across the roofs, and regained the stairway.

The street was empty. From one of the doorways

a voice called to him to come back. But he walked on, up the street and across the roadway to a green-painted wicket. It opened upon a garden, and across the garden he came to a flight of steps with an open door above. Through this, too, he passed and stared into a small room. On the far side of it, in an armchair, sat Corporal Sam, leaning back, with a hand to his breast; and facing him, with a face full of innocent wonder, stood a child—a small, grave, curly-headed child.

VIII

"I'm glad you done it quick," said Corporal Sam.

His voice was weak, yet he managed to get out the words firmly, leaning back in the wooden arm-chair, with one hand on his left breast, spread and covering the lower ribs.

The sergeant did not answer at once. Between the spread fingers he saw a thin stream welling, darker than the scarlet tunic which it discoloured. For perhaps three seconds he watched it. To him the time seemed as many minutes, and all the while he was aware of the rifle-barrel warm in his grasp.

"Because," Corporal Sam pursued with a smile that wavered a little, half wistfully seeking his eyes, "you'd 'a had to do it, anyway—wouldn't you? And any other way it—might—'a been hard."

"Lad, what *made* you?"

It was all Sergeant Wilkes could say, and he said it, wondering at the sound of his own voice. The child, who, seeing that the two were friends and not, after all, disposed to murder one another, had wandered to the head of the stairs to look down into the sunlit garden shining below, seemed to guess that something was amiss after all, and, wandering back, stood at a little distance, finger to lip.

"I don't know," the corporal answered, like a man with difficulty trying to collect his thoughts. "Leastways, not to explain to you. It must 'a been comin' on for some time."

"But *what*, lad—*what?*"

"Ah—'what?' says you. That's the trouble, and I can't never make you *see*—yes, make you *see*—the hell of it. It began with thinkin'—just with thinkin'—*that first night you led me home from the breach.* And the things I saw and heard; and then, when I came here, only meanin' to save *him*——"

He broke off and nodded at the child, who catching his eye, nodded back smiling.

He and the corporal had evidently made great friends.

But the corporal's gaze, wavering past him, had fixed itself on a trestle bed in the corner.

"There was a woman," he said. "She was stone cold; but the child told me—until I stopped his

mouth, and made a guess at the rest. I took her down and buried her in the garden. And with that it came over me that the whole of it—the whole business—was wrong, and that to put myself right I must kill, and keep on killing. Of course I knew what the end would be. But I never looked for such luck as *your* coming. . . . I was ashamed, first along, catching sight o' you—not—not ashamed, only I didn't want you to see. But when you took cover an' waited—though I wouldn't 'a hurt you for worlds—why then I knew how the end would be."

"Lad," said the sergeant, watching him as he panted, "I don't understand you, except that you're desperate wrong. But I saw you—saw you by the lookin' glass, behind there; and 'tis right you should know."

"O' course you saw me. . . . I'm not blamin', am I? You had to do it, and I had to take it. That was the easiest way. I couldn' do no other, an' you couldn' do no other, that bein' your duty. An' the child, there——"

Sergeant Wilkes turned for a moment to the child, who met his gaze, round-eyed; then to his friend again.

But the corporal's head had dropped forward on his chest.

The sergeant touched his shoulder, to make sure; then, with one look behind him, but ignoring the

child, reeled out of the room and down the stairs, as in a dream. In the sunny garden the fresh air revived him and he paused to stare at a rose-bush, rampant, covered with white blossoms against which the bees were humming. Their hum ran in his head so that he failed to notice that the sound of musketry had died down. An hour before it had been death to walk, as he did, under the convent wall and out into the street leading to the lesser breach. The convent had, in fact, surrendered, and its defenders were even now withdrawing up the hill to the citadel. He found the lesser breach and climbed down it to the shore of the Urumea, beside the deserted ford across which the Portuguese had waded on the morning of the second assault. Beyond it shone the sandhills, hiding our batteries.

He sat down on the bank and pulled off boots and socks, preparing to wade; but turned at a slight sound.

The child had followed him and stood halfway down the ruins of the breach, wistful, uncertain.

In a rage, as one threatens off an importunate dog, Sergeant Wilkes waved an arm. The child turned and slunk away, back into San Sebastian.

THE COPERNICAN CONVOY

[*The story is told by Will Fleming, of the Inner Temple, Barrister-at-law, and sometime Cornet of the 32nd Troop of Horse in the Parliament Army, then (December, 1643) quartered at Farnham, on the Hants border.*]

I

I DARE say that, since the world began and men learned to fight, was never an army moderately prosperous and yet fuller of grumblers than was ours during the latter weeks of November and the first fortnight of December, 1643. In part the blame lay upon our general, Sir William Waller, and his fondness for night attacks and beating up of quarters. He rested neither himself nor his men, but spent them without caring, and drove not a few to desert in mere fatigue. This was his way, and it differed from the way of my Lord Essex, who rather spilled his strength by lethargy and grieved over it. 'Twas notorious these two generals loved not one another: and 'tis not for me, who never served under Essex, to take sides. But I will say this for General Waller—that he spared himself as little as any common soldier;

never forgot the face of a good servant; and in general fed his men well and hated arrears of pay like the devil.

Nevertheless, and hate it though he might, our pay was in arrears. Moreover, apart from their fatigue of marching and counter-marching, the bulk of our infantry had been drawn from the London train-bands —the Red Westminster regiment and the Auxiliaries, Green and Yellow, of London City and the Tower Hamlets; tradesmen, that is to say, who wearied to be home again with their wives and families after six months' separation, and others (such as the White Regiment of Auxiliaries) freshly drafted, that had scarce got over the remembrance of parting. These regiments, too, comprised many score of apprentices, whom Parliament allowed to count their time of military service as though it had been spent with their masters: and as apprentice and master marched side by side, and it often fell that the youngster won promotion, with leave to order his elder about, you may guess there were heart-burnings. Add to this that it kept these good citizens chafing to note how often (and indeed regularly) advancement passed them over to light on some young gentleman of family or "imp," as they growled, "from the Inns of Court."

We lay—in horse and foot some five thousand strong—well centred in and about the town and castle

of Farnham, with a clear road to London behind us and in front a nearly equal enemy planted across our passage to the West. You may take a map with ruler and pencil and draw a line through from Winchester to Oxford, where the King kept his Court. On the base of it, at Winchester, rested General Hopton's main force. North and east of it, at Alton, my Lord Crawford stood athwart the road with sufficient cavalry and Colonel Bolle's regiment of foot; yet farther north, Basing House, with my Lord of Winchester's garrison, blocked the upper path for us; and yet beyond, Sir Edward Ford's regiment held the passes of the hills toward Oxford; so that for the while, and in face of us, messengers, troops, even artillery, might pass to and fro without challenge.

This line of defence, though it forestalled us on every road, was weak in that it drew out Hopton's strength and attenuated it at too great distances. This our general perceived, and nursed himself for a sudden blow.

*

Now I must mention that with the entry of December there fell the beginning of a cruel frost, that lasted six weeks and was enough to make this winter memorable without help of wars or bloodshed. At the first we all hailed it, as hardening the roads, which for a month had been nigh impassable: and either commander took speedy advantage of it—

Hopton to make a swift diversion into Sussex and capture Arundel Castle (which was but a by-blow, for in a few weeks he had lost it again), and our own general to post up with his short, quick legs to London, where in two days he had wrung from Essex good reinforcements, with promise of pay for the troops and a consignment of leathern guns—a new invention and extremely portable. By the evening of December 5th he was back among us and dispatching us north, south, and east to keep the enemy jumping while our supplies drew in.

It was one of those night skirmishes or surprises that brought me promotion. For on the evening of December 10th our troop, being ordered out to beat up the neighbourhood of Odiham, on the way fell in with a half-squadron of the Lord Crawford's cuirassiers, and in the loose pistol-firing we took five prisoners and lost our cornet, Master John Ingoldby. The next day we rested; and that morning, as I sat on a rusty harrow by the forge close beside Farnham Church and watched the farrier roughing my horse, our Sergeant-Major Le Gaye, a Walloon, came up to me and desired me to attend on Colonel Stuckey, who presently and with many kind expressions told me that I was chosen to fill the room of the dead cornet.

Now this was flattering: and you may think with what elation of mind I took it, being eager and young (in fact, scarce turned twenty). But almost it jumped

beyond my ambitions at the time. I was one of five sergeants of the troop, the unripest among them and already accounted lucky. I knew well that this advancement had passed them and reached me less for my deserving than because our colonel preferred to have his commands carried by men of decent birth. I knew the whole army to be sore already over fifty like promotions; and foresaw grumbling.

"I bear ye no malice"—this was the way that Roger Inch took it, our senior sergeant. "But you'll allow 'tis disheartening to be set aside for a lawyer-fellow that, a year ago, had never groomed horsehair but on his own wig." And so—but less kindly—the rest of my fellow-sergeants expressed themselves.

None the less they were ready enough, that evening, to join in drinking to my new honours. The place was the Bear Inn, in Farnham; the liquor, warmed ale; and I paid the scot. Towards midnight Sergeant Inch had so far forgot his rancour as to strike up his song of "Robin and the Night Owl"—"Robin," I should explain, being the Earl of Essex, and the "Night Owl" our own general, so nicknamed for his activities after dark.

We broke no regulations by this revelry, being allowed by custom, after a night in saddle, to spend the next as we chose, provided that we kept to quarters. For me, though I had done better in bed, snatching a little sleep, the time was past for seeking it. A

piquet of ours had been flung out to westward of the town, on the Alton Road, and at twelve o'clock I was due to relieve it. So I pushed the drink around, and felt their grudge against me lessening while Sergeant Inch sang—

"Robin's asleep, for Robin is nice;
Robin has delicate habits;
But 'Whoo!' says the grey Night Owl—once, twice,
And three times 'Whoo!' for the little shy mice,
The mice and the rats and the rabbits,
'Who-oo!'"

At the close of every verse he mimicked an owl's call to the life—having in his young days been a verderer of the New Forest, on the edge of Bradley Plain; and at the end of his third verse, in the middle of a hoot, was answered by a trumpet not far away upon the road to Alton.

At the sound of it we sprang up, all of us, and two or three ran out into the street: for the beating up of quarters had become a bad habit with the two armies, useless as the most of us thought it. The night outside was freezing villainously: it struck chill into me after the hot room and the ale-drinking. The moon, as I remember, was high, shedding a soft foggy light down the roadway: and there, by the inn doorway, I stood for a minute or two, with my hand on my sword, peering and listening. To right and left, and from behind me, came sounds of men moving in their billets to the alarm and waiting, as I was waiting. But no

noise of attack followed the first summons; and by-and-by I drew back as a brisk footfall broke the hush and came hurrying down to the doorway of the Bear, where it halted.

"Is that you, Fleming?" said the voice of old Price, our Welsh quartermaster. "Then turn out quick to the West Gate! The enemy has sent in a trumpet in form, and you are to convey him up to the Castle."

Without delay I fetched my roan mare from the stable, mounted, and rode out beyond the West Gate to a point where the little river Wey runs close alongside the high-road. There I found the trumpet in converse with our piquet, and took stock of him by aid of the sergeant's lantern. He was a blackavised, burly fellow, with heavy side-locks, a pimpled face, and about the nose a touch of blue that, methought, did not come of the frosty air. He sat very high in saddle, upon a large-jointed bay, and wore a stained coat that covered his regimentals and reached almost to his rowels. A dirty red feather wagged over his hat-brim. As I rode up he greeted me with a jovial brotherly curse, and hoped—showing me his letter—that we kept good drink at the Castle. "And if so," he added, "your little William the Conqueror may keep me so long as he has a mind to."

I told him, as we rode back and into Farnham, that Sir William, as a rule, made quick dispatch of business,

"He made pretty quick dispatch of it at Lansdowne," said my Cavalier, and started trolling a catch—

> "Great William the Con,
> So fast he did run,
> That he left half his name behind him!"

Perceiving him to be an ill-bred fellow, and that to answer his jeering would be time wasted, I turned the talk upon his message.

"The Lord Crawford sends for an exchange of prisoners?" I hazarded.

"The Lord Crawford does not waste a man of my talents in swapping of prisoners," was the response. "And when Orlando Rich takes the road and risks his health on such a night as this, you may be sure 'tis on business of moment."

I questioned him no further. We rode through the park (the sentries taking my password), and came to the guard-room of the Castle, where, as we dismounted, the general's quartermaster lounged out and called for a couple of men to take our horses. Then, learning that my companion brought a message from Lord Crawford, he made no delay but led us straight to the general's room.

Though the clock in the corner had gone midnight, the general sat in a litter of papers with a lamp at his elbow and his legs stretched out to a bright sea-coal fire. With him was closeted Colonel

Pottley, of the London train-bands, and by the look of the papers around them they had been checking the lists (as two days later there was heavy court-martialling among the newly arrived drafts and cashiering of officers that had misbehaved in Middlesex).

"You come from the Earl of Crawford?" asked the general, not rising from his chair, but holding out a hand for the letter.

The messenger presented it, with a good soldierly salute; and so stood, pulling at his moustachios and looking fierce.

"Your name?"

"Sergeant Orlando Rich, of the Earl's Loyal Troop."

The general broke the seal, ran his eye over the paper, and let out a short laugh.

"His lordship sends me his loving compliment and prays me to spare him a runlet of sack or of malvoisy, for that his own wine is drunk out and the ale at Alton does not agree with his stomach."

"Nor with any man's," corroborated Sergeant Rich.

"He promises to send me a fat ox in exchange, and—" the General glanced to the foot of the scrawl, turned the paper over, and found it blank save for the name and direction—"and that, it seems, is all. No talk of prisoners. . . . Truly an urgent message to send post at midnight!"

"If you had seen his lordship's condition——" murmured Sergeant Rich.

"His lordship shall have a full hogshead; but not by you;" the General shot a shrewd glance at the man and bade me step outside and summon the quartermaster who waited in the corridor. "Quartermaster," said he, "convey this visitor of ours to the kitchens. Give him what meat and wine he demands. Let him depart when he will and carry as much as he will—under his skin. Meantime order out three of the pack-nags, and tell the cellarer to fetch up six firkins of the sack sent down to me last Thursday by Mr. Trenchard. Have them slung, a pair to each horse, and well secured—for the roads are slippery. And you, Master Fleming——"

I saluted; flushing, perhaps, a little with pleasure that he remembered my name.

"Do you mount guard to-night? Then we must find you a substitute. What say you to convoying this wine, with a trumpet, to my Lord Crawford? You may choose half a dozen of your troop to ride with you. The road to Alton cannot easily be missed; and, if it could—why, these night sallies are the best of training for a young soldier. I doubt, Master Fleming, that since this morning, when I promoted you cornet, you have heard talk that glanced upon your rawness, hey? Well, here is a chance for you to learn. For my part I call no man a finished

campaigner until he can smell his way through a strange country in the dark. You fancy the errand? Then go, and prosper: and be sure my Lord Crawford will treat you kindly, when he has once tasted my wine."

II

THE stroke of one in the morning, sounding after us from Farnham clock through the fine frosted air, overtook us well upon the road. I had made speed, and so had the quartermaster and cellarer. As for Sergeant Orlando Rich, if he had not achieved speed he had at least made haste. Before I started my pack-horses from the guardroom door the cellarer came to me and reported him drunk as a fly; and stepping into the great kitchen for a slice of pasty, to fortify me against the night's work, I saw my hero laid out and snoring, with his shoulder-blades flat on the paved floor. So I left him to sleep it off.

A fellow of the general's own guard helped me lead my horses to the door of the Bear, and there I tumbled out my substitute, and six passably good troopers I had chosen to take with me. They were Carey, our youngest sergeant, and as good-natured a fellow as I knew; Randles, who stood well for advancement to the post my own promotion had left vacant; and four other privates—Shackell, Wyld,

Masters, and Small Owens (as we called him), a Welshman from the Vale of Cardigan. To prime them for the ride I called up the landlord and dosed them each with a glass of hot Hollands water; and forth we set, in good trim and spirits.

For two miles after passing our piquet we ambled along at ease. The moon was low in the south-west, but as yet gave us plenty of light; and the wind—from the quarter directly opposite—though bitter and searching, blew behind our right shoulders and helped us cheerfully along. Our troubles began in a dip of the road on this side of the hamlet of Froyl, where an autumn freshet, flooding the highway, had been caught by the frost and fixed in a rippled floor of ice. We had seen duly to the roughing of our own chargers; and even they were forced at this passage to feel their steps mincingly; but the pack-horses, for whom I had only the quartermaster's assurance, had been handled (if indeed at all) by the inexpertest of smiths. The poor beasts sprawled and slithered this way and that, and in the end, as if by consent, came to a pitiful halt, their knees shaking under them. So they appeared willing to wait and tremble until morning: but on my order Randles, Owen, and Masters, dismounting, led them and their own horses, foot by foot, on to sure ground.

For a mile beyond, and some way past Froyl, was safe going if we avoided the ruts. But here the moon failed us; and when Carey lit a lantern to help, it showed

us that the carriers had no stomach left in them. One, though the froth froze on him, was sweating like a resty colt. The other two, if we slacked hold on their halter-ropes, would lurch together, halt, and slue neck to neck like a couple of timid dowagers hesitating upon a question of delicacy.

It was here that there came into my head the ill-starred thought of leading them off the road and through the fields close alongside of it on our left hand. The road itself I knew pretty well, and that it bore gradually to the left, all the way to Alton. Carey, whom I consulted, agreed that we could find it again at any time we chose. So, and without more ado, we opened the next gate we came to, and herded the beasts through.

The first two fields, being stubble, served us well; and the next, a pasture, was even better. Beyond this we had some trouble to find a gate, but at length Masters hit on one a little way out of our course, and it led to a wide plowland, freshly turned but hard-frozen, in the furrows of which our horses boggled a good deal. We pushed across it, holding our line in a long slant back towards the loom of the tall hedge that (as we agreed) marked the course of the highway. On the far side of the plow this hedge ran down hill towards us and more sharply than I had reckoned: yet before regaining it we had to cross another pasture. I was the surer that this must

be the road because of a light that shone straight ahead of us, which I took to be the direction of Holibourne village. I should mention, too, that on our left all the way the ground descended in an easy slope, but the frost had bound the little river running below and held it silent.

Sure enough on the far side of the pasture we came to a gate, and Shackell, who was leading, announced that the high-road lay beyond. But a minute later he called to us that this could not be: it was too narrow, a mere lane in fact; and with that, as we pressed up to the gate, the mischief happened.

The cause of it was a poor starved jackass, that had been sheltering himself under the lee of the hedge, and now, as we all but trampled him, heaved himself out of the shadow with a bray of terror. The sound, bursting upon us at close quarters, was as a stone hurled into a pool. Round went our horses' rumps, and up went heels and hoofs. I heard Little Owens cry aloud that his nose was broken. "Catch hold of the pack-beasts!" I shouted, as they shied back upon us, and two were caught and held fast—I know not by whom. The third, the resty one, springing backwards past me, almost on his haunches, jerked his halter wide of my clutch, and in a moment was galloping full flight down the slope.

With a call to the others to stand steady and wait for me, I wheeled my mare about and rode off in

chase, to round him up. The almost total darkness made this hunting mighty unpleasant; but I knew that, bating the chance of being flung by a mole-hill, I had my gentleman safe enough. For, to begin with, he must soon find the pace irksome, with two firkin casks jolting against his ribs; and at the foot of the descent the river would surely head him off. To be sure it was frozen hard and he might have crossed it dry-footed, but the alders on the bank frighted him back, and presently I had him penned in an angle between hedge and stream. Here, as I slowed up and advanced to coax him, from out of the darkness behind him there broke suddenly a shouting and pounding of hoofs, and close in front of me (but hidden by the hedge) a troop of horsemen clattered down from the farther slope and up the lane where my comrades were gathered.

If for a moment I doubted what it all might mean, a couple of pistol-shots, followed by a loose volley that mixt itself with oaths and yells, all too quickly put this out of doubt. My men were being charged, without question or challenge, by a troop of the enemy, while separated by a quarter of a mile of darkness and stiff rising ground from me, who alone carried their credentials. Little need to say in what hurry I wheeled my mare about to the slope, struck spur, dragged my trumpet loose on its sling and blew, as best I could, the call that both armies accepted for

note of parley. Belike (let me do the villains this credit), with the jolt and heave of the mare's shoulders knocking the breath out of me, I sounded it ill, or in the noise and scuffle they heard confusedly and missed heeding. The firing continued, at any rate, and before I gained the gate the fight had swept up the lane.

I swung out upon the hard stones and dashed after it. But the enemy, by this, had my fellows on the run, and were driving them at stretch gallop. To worsen my plight, as I pursued I caught sound of hoofs pounding behind and, as it seemed, overtaking me; supposed that a horseman was riding me down; and, reining the mare back fiercely, slued about to meet his onset. It proved to be the poor pack-horse I had left in the valley! He must have galloped like a racer; but now he came to a halt, and thrust his poor bewildered face towards me through the darkness. Commending him to the devil, I wheeled about once more and struck spur; and as I galloped, he galloped anew behind.

This diversion had cost me a good fifty yards. I knew well enough that the lane sooner or later must lead out into the high-road, and made sure that if my fellows gained it first they would head back for Farnham. (What would befall me I left to Providence!) But some two or three of the enemy must have raced ahead and cut off that retreat; for when

I came to it the way to the right lay open indeed, but the whole welter was pounding down the road to the left, straight for Alton. Again I followed, and in less than two hundred yards was pressing close upon three or four of the rearmost riders. This seemed to me good opportunity for another call on my trumpet, and I blew, without easing my speed. On the sound of it, one of the dark figures in front swung round in saddle and fired. I saw the flash and the light of it on his gorget and morion: and with that, the bullet glancing against my mare's shoulder, she swerved wildly, leapt high, and came down with forelegs planted, pitching me neck-and crop out of saddle upon the frozen road.

III

Doubtless the fall stunned me; but doubtless also not for more than a few seconds. For I awoke to the drum of distant hoofs, and before it died clean away I had recovered sense enough to take its bearing in the direction of Farnham. Strangely enough, towards Alton all was quiet. Sitting up, with both hands pressing my head, for just a moment I recognized the gallop for my own mare's. Another beat time with it. I asked myself, why another? She would be heading for home—wounded, perhaps—scared certainly. But why with a companion? . . . Then, suddenly,

I remembered the poor pack-beast; and as I remembered him, all my faculties grew clouded.

Or so, at least, I must suppose; for of the sudden silence on the Alton road I thought not at all. What next engaged me was a feeling of surprise that, of my two hands pressed on my temples, the right was cold, but the left, though it met the wind, unaccountably warm—the wrist below it even deliciously, or so it felt until rubbing my palms together I found them sticky, with blood.

The blood, I next discovered, was welling from a cut on my left temple. Putting up my fingers, I felt the fresh flow running over a crust of it frozen on my cheek; and wondered how I might staunch it. I misdoubted my strength to find the lane again and creep down to the river; and the river, moreover, would be frozen. For a certainty I should freeze to death where I lay, and even more surely on the road back to Farnham I must faint and drop and, dropping, be frozen. With that, I remembered the light we had seen shining ahead of us as we crossed the fields; and staggered along in search of it, after first groping for my morion, which had rolled into the hedge some paces away.

For a while, confused in my bearings, I sought on the wrong hand; but by-and-by caught the twinkle of it through a gate to the left, and studied it, leaning my arms on the bar. The house whence it

shone could not be any part of Holibourne village, but must stand somewhere on high rising ground across the valley. I might reckon to reach it by turning back and taking the lane in which we had been surprised: but this meant fetching a long circuit. I was weakening with loss of blood, and—it coming into my mind that the river below would be hard—I resolved to steer a straight line and risk obstacles.

As it turned out, there were none, or none to throw me back. At the stream-side, holding by an elder-bough, I tested the ice with my weight, proved it firm, crossed without so much as cracking it, and breasted a bare grassy slope, too little to be called a down, where a few naked hawthorns chafed and creaked in the wind. Above it was an embankment rounded like a bastion, up the left side of which I crept—or, you might almost say, crawled—and, reaching the top, found myself close under the front of a dwelling-house.

It was coated with whitewash, the glimmer of which showed me the queer shape of the building even in the darkness. It consisted of two storeys, both round as pepper-pots. Above the first ran a narrow circular thatch, serving as a mat (so to say) for the second and smaller pepper-pot. I could not discern how this upper storey was roofed, but the roof had a hole in it, from which poured a stray ray of

light. Light shone too, but through a blind, from a small window close under the eaves. The lower storey showed none at all.

I rapped on the door. There came no response, though I waited and listened for a full minute. I rapped again and shouted; and was about to challenge for the third time, when the threshold showed a chink of light. Muffled footsteps came down the passage, and with much creaking the bolts were undrawn.

"Who knocks?" demanded a man's voice, somewhat shrill and querulous. "Cannot a poor scholar rest in peace, and at this time o' night?"

"In the name of Charity!" I urged.

He flung the door open and stood with a hand-lamp held high, surveying me: a little old man, thin as a rat, in skull-cap, furred gown and list slippers. The lamp shone down on his silvered hair and on a pair of spectacles he had pushed up to the edge of his cap; and showed me a face mildly meditative from the brow down to the chin, which by contrast was extremely resolute.

"More soldiers!" he observed testily. "The plague take it that they and the meteors must choose the same night to drop from heaven! How many of you, this time?"

I answered that I was alone, and would have added a word on my plight; but this, beneath the lamplight, he could not miss perceiving, for my face

and the left shoulder of my buff coat were a mask of blood.

"H'm!"—he cut me short. "It may sound to you unfeeling: but if Heaven persists in sending me soldiers I had rather physic than feed them": and with that he stood aside as inviting me to enter. Be sure I obeyed him gladly, and, stepping inside, rested my hand for a moment against the jamb of a door that stood open to the right. The ray of his lamp, as he held it near to examine me, gave me a glimpse of the room within—of a table with cloth awry, of overturned flagons lying as they had spilt their wine-stains, of chairs and furniture pushed this way and that.

"So your predecessors have left me," said the old gentleman, catching the direction of my gaze and nodding. "Whether or no they have left me enough for the morning's breakfast is a matter my servant must discover when he comes over from Holibourne at daylight."

"They were Malignants, sir, as I guess: the Earl of Crawford's men."

"Devil a groat care I what you call them, or they call themselves! I study the heavens and take no heed of your sublunary divisions. But they have eaten and drunk me out of house and home; at that hour, too, when the most meteors were predicted: and what is worse they invaded my garret in their clumsy

jack-boots, and have thrown my Orchestra Cœli out of gear. I was mending it when you knocked. By the way," he added more kindly, "I can go on mending it while you wash your wound, which will appear less horrid when cleansed of all this blood. I have a fire upstairs, and hot water. Come."

He closed the outer door and, taking me gently by the elbow, half-supported me up the stairway, which was little better than a ladder, and led direct to the strangest room I have ever set eyes on.

It was circular—in diameter perhaps twelve feet—with a high conical roof. The roof had an inner lining of wood, and through a hole in it—where a panel had been slid back—a large optic-glass, raised on a pivot-stand, thrust its nose out into the night. Close within the door stood an oaken press, and beside it, on a tripod, a brazier filled with charcoal and glowing. A truckle-bed, a chair, and two benches made up the rest of the furniture: and of the benches one was crowded with all manner of tools—files by the score, pliers, small hammers, besides lenses, compasses, rules, and a heap of brass filings; the other, for two-thirds of its length, was a litter of books and papers. But the end nearest to the working-bench had been cleared, and here stood a mighty curious intricate mechanism of wheels and brass wire and little brass balls, with fine brass chains depending through holes in the board. My host flung a tender

look at it across his shoulder as he stepped to the press to fetch basin and towel.

"The oaf has dislocated the pin of the fly-wheel," he grunted. "Praise Heaven, he never guessed that it worked on a diamond, or slight chance had my poor toy with his loutish fingers stuck in it!"

He filled the basin with water from a copper ewer that rested close to the brazier on a pile of folios, and set it to heat. "I doubt I must give up the meteors to-night," he continued, and went back to his machine, with which, I could see, his fingers were itching to be busy.

I asked, "Is that, sir, an invention of yours?"

"Ay, soldier," he answered; "mine solely; the child of my brain's begetting." His hands hovered over the delicate points and wires. "And to be murdered thus by a great thumb-fingered dragoneer!" With a lens and a delicate needle, he began to peer and prise in it; and anon, fixing the lens in his eye, reached out for his hand-lamp.

"To what use have you designed it, sir?" I asked, after a while spent in watching him.

"To no use at all, soldier," he answered, more tartly. "The water is warm, and you can bathe your hurt and afterwards I will plaster it." While I laved my temple with the edge of the towel, between the dip of the water I heard his voice in broken sentences: "To no use at all. . . . Would a man ask the sun

to what use it danced? . . . or the moon and planets? . . ."

I looked up, dabbing my wound gently. His voice had risen and stretched itself on a high, monotonous pitch. He was declaiming verse.

> "Who doth not see the measures of the Moon?
> Which thirteen times she dances every year,
> And ends her Pavane thirteen times as soon
> As doth——

Hey? Do you know the lines, soldier?" He stepped forward and peered close at my head while I shook it. "Tush! a cut, a trifle! Go on bathing. . . . The lines, sir, were writ by Sir John Davies, the first of English poets."

"Indeed, sir," said I. "Now at the Inner Temple, before mixing myself in these troubles, I used to read much poetry and dispute on it with other young men. We had our several laureates; but believe me—and despise if you will—although we had heard tell of Sir John Davies, I doubt if one in six of us had read a line of him."

"Ay, indeed," he caught me up, "I have scarce read a line of any other. Having discovered him I had no need. For allow me to observe—although I know nothing about it—that in poetry the Subject is nine points of excellence; and, Sir John Davies having hit on the most exalted subject tractable by the Muse, it follows that he must be the most exalted

poet. Let me tell you—if it will shorten argument—that in general, and in all walks of life, I hate the second-best."

"I have heard, sir," said I, "that this masterpiece was a poem on Dancing. But you must be thinking of another."

"Not at all, young man," my host replied, poring anew into his toy. "'Orchestra' is the name of it; the subject, Dancing. But what dancing!—the sun, the moon, the stars—— Eh? Halleluia, but it goes again!"

Sure enough, bending over the basin, I heard a buzz of wheels, and looked up to see the whole machine springing like a score of whipping-tops gone mad, the brass balls swinging and rotating so fast that the eye lost them in little twinkling circles and ellipses, the wheels whirring and filling the room with their hum.

My astronomer had dived under the bench. I saw for the moment little more than his posterior and the soles of his list slippers.

"You'll pardon me," I heard him grunt, and the speed of the machinery slackened as he attached a couple of leaden weights to the dependent chains. He backed, crawled out, and stood erect; adjusted his spectacles, and stood beaming upon his invention.

"But what is the signification, sir?" I asked, rising from my chair and stepping close.

"Ah! You improve, soldier. It hath signification, not use: and it signifies the motion of the heavens. See—this larger ball is the sun; and here, on their several rods, the planets—all swinging in their courses. By a pointer on this dial-plate—observe me now—I reduce the space of a day to one, two, three minutes, as I chose, retarding or accelerating, but always in just proportion. 'Tis set for these December days; you will remark the sun's ambit—how it lies south of the zenith, and how far short it rises and falls from the equinoctial points. But wait awhile, and in a few minutes—that is to say, days—you shall see him start to widen his circuit. Here now is Saturn, with his rim: and here Venus—mark how delicately she lifts, following the motion of her lord—

"'Just with the Sun her dainty feet doth move'—

and this is Dancing—Orchestra Cœli—the Dancing of the Firmament."

"Wonderful!" I cried.

"You shall say so, presently! So far you have only seen: now hear!"

He drew out a small brass pin from the foot of the mechanism, and at once it began to hum, on three or four notes such as children make with a comb and a scrap of paper.

The notes lifted and fell, and the little balls —each in his separate circle—wheeled and spun,

twinkling in time with them, until my head, too, began to swim.

"It will run for an hour now," my host assured me. "Indeed, with one to watch and draw up the weights at due intervals, it will run for ever."

"It dizzies me," said I.

"Your head is light, belike, with the loss of blood. Sit you back in the chair, and I will try now what may be done with ointment and plaster."

He forced me to seat myself and, fetching a small medicine-box from the press, began to operate. His fingers were extraordinarily quick and thin, and so delicate of touch that I felt no pain, or very little: but though I lay with my head far back and saw the machine no longer, it had set my brain spinning, and the pressure of his hands appeared to be urging it round and round, while his voice (for he talked without intermission) mingled and interwove itself with the drone of the music from the table. He was reciting verses; from his favourite poem, no doubt. But though the sound of them ran in my ears like a brook, I can remember one couplet only—

> "And all in sundry measures do delight,
> Yet altogether keep no measure right. . . ."

I dare say that, yielding to the giddiness, I swooned: and yet I can remember no interval. The circles seemed to have hold of me, to be drawing me down, and yet down; until, like a diver half-bursting for

breath, I found strength, sprang upwards, and reached the surface with a cry.

The cry rang in my ears yet. But had it come, after all, from my own lips? I gripped the arms of the chair in a kind of terror, and leaned forward, staring at my host, who had fallen back a pace, and stood between me and the lamp.

"Pardon me, sir," I found voice to say after a pause. "I must have fallen into a doze, I think. My head——" I put a hand up to it and discovered that it was bandaged. He did not answer me, but appeared to be listening. "My head——" I repeated, and again stopped short—this time at sound of a cry.

It came from the night without: and at once I knew it to be a repetition of the sound that had aroused me. Nor was it, in fact, a cry, though it rose like a cry against the wind: rather, a confused uproar of voices, continuous, drawing nearer and nearer.

Then, as I stared at my host and he at me, the noise became articulate as drunken singing—"*Tow, row, row! Tow, row, row! . . . Crop-headed Puritans, tow, row, row. . . . Boot and saddle, and tow, row, row!*—and, nearing so, broke into chorus—

> "Waller and Hazelrigg, Stapleton, Scroop—
> Way! Make way for his Majesty's troop!
> Crop-headed Puritans durstn't deny
> His Majesty's gentlemen riding by,
> With boot and saddle and tow-row-row!"

"Good Lord!" muttered my host, casting out his two hands in despair. "More soldiers!"

But by this time I had my hand on the door. "Guide me down the stairs," I commanded; "down to the door! And, before you open it, quench the light!"

By the time we reached the door the voices were close at hand, coming down the lane: and by each note of them I grew more clearly convinced. "Sir," I asked in a whisper, "does this lane lead off from the road on the near side of Alton?"

For a moment it seemed that he did not hear me. "Pray Heaven I dowsed the light in time!" he chattered. "Three visits in one night is more than my sins deserve. . . . Yes; the lane enters a half-mile this side of Alton, and returns back——"

"Well enough I know where it returns back," said I. "Man, did you bewitch them?—as, a while ago, you bewitched me?"

"Eh?"

I felt that he was peering at me in the dark.

"*Something* has bewitched them," I persisted. "Either the wine or that devil's toy of yours has hold of them; or the both, belike. These are the same men, and have travelled full circle, listen to them!—'tis the music of the spheres, sir."

"I believe you are right," said my host, with a chuckle. "O, Copernicus!"

I drew the door open gently and looked aloft. The night, before so starry, was now clouded over. The troopers—I could hear their horses' hoofs above the whoops and yells of their chorussing—were winding downhill by a sunken way within ten yards of me. A gravel path lay between me and the hedge overlooking it. This I saw by the faint upcast rays of the lanterns they had lit for guidance. I tip-toed across to the hedge, and, peering over, was relieved of my last doubt: for at the tail of the procession and under charge of one drunken trooper for whipper-in, rode all my poor comrades with arms triced behind them and ankles lamentably looped under their horses' bellies.

Even as they passed a thought came into my head: and the face of the whipper-in—seen dimly in the shadow of a lantern he joggled at his saddle-bow—decided me. I slipped off my sash, looped it loosely in my hand, and so, without waiting to say farewell to my host, slid down the bank into the lane.

Though I shot over the frozen bank a deal faster than ever I intended and dropped on the roadway with a thud, the trooper, bawling his chorus, did not turn in his saddle. I tip-toed after him, between a walk and a run, and still he did not turn. Not till I was level with his stirrup did he guess that I was on him; and even so he could scarcely roar out a curse before

I had my sash flung over him and with a jerk fetched him clean out of his saddle. As he pitched sideways, the lantern fell with a clatter and rolled into the hedge.

"What the devil's up with you, back there!" At the noise, I heard two or three of the midmost troopers rein up.

"Right! All right!" I called forward to them, catching the horse's bridle and at the same time stooping over the poor fool—to gag him, if need were. He lay as he had fallen. I hope I have not his death to my account, and for certain no corpse lay in the road when I passed along it a few hours later.

"Right!" I called sturdily, deepening my voice to imitate that of my victim as nearly as I could match it—

"Crop-headed Puritans, tow-row-row!"

Still shouting the chorus, I mastered the reluctant horse, swung myself into saddle, and edged up towards my comrades.

"Carey! Shackell!" I called softly, overtaking them.

At the sound of my voice, they came near to letting out a cry that had spoilt all. Masters, indeed, started a yell: but Small Owens (whose hands I had fortunately cut the first) reached out a hand and clapped it over his mouth.

"How many be they?" I asked, as we rode.

"Twenty-two," answered Randles, chafing his wrists, "and all drunk as lords."

"If we had arms," said Carey, "we might drive the whole lot."

"But since you have not," said I, "we must pitch our attempt lower. In three minutes we shall reach the high-road; and then strike spurs all to the right for Farnham!"

But our luck proved better than we hoped. For as we drew near the exit of the lane, I heard a voice challenge. The chorus, which had lasted us all the way, ceased on a sudden, and was taken up by a pistol-shot. At once I guessed that here must be help, and, feeling for my trumpet, found it and blew the call. Naked of weapons as my comrades were, we charged down on the rear, broke it, and flung it upon the darkness, where by this time we could hear the voice of Wilkins, our sergeant-major, bellowing above the tumult.

Within five minutes this double charge settled all. The pack-horses were ours again, with twenty-one inebriate prisoners. My mare, galloping home with the third pack-horse at her heels, had alarmed the piquet, and Wilkins, with twenty men, had turned out to scour the Alton road.

So, while we secured our drunkards to the last man, I had leisure to bless my fortune.

IV

By this time dawn had begun to grow in the sky behind us. I handed over the prisoners to Wilkins and Carey, and gave Wyld and Masters leave to return with them to Farnham: "for," said I, "they seem the weariest, and Shackell and Small Owens will serve well enough for escort by daylight."

Wilkins stared. "You are not telling me," said he, "that you intend going forward with that silly wine, and you in such plight!"

"There's my orders, to begin with," said I; "and —bless the man!—you don't suppose, after this night's work, I mean to miss the fun of it, now that the luck is turned and is running. As for the wine, Lord Crawford will get but three firkins for his hogshead; but if his rascals choose to play highwaymen upon a peaceful convoy, that is *his* look-out. And as for my plight, I shall present myself with these bandages and ask him what manner of troops he commands, that do violence upon a trumpet honourably sent to him and on his own petition."

And this (to shorten my tale) I did. With Shackell and Small Owens I herded my two pack-horses along the road to Alton, and arrived at the earl's outposts without mishap and within half an hour past daybreak. There I sounded my trumpet, and was led without ado to his lordship's headquarters.

I found him seated with his secretary and with a grave, handsome man, Colonel John Bolle, that commanded his regiment of infantry, and was killed next day defending Alton Church (I have heard), in the very pulpit. This Colonel Bolle bowed to me very courteously, but the earl (as one could tell at first sight) was sulky: belike by deprivation of his favourite drink. Or perhaps the ale he took in lieu of it—he had a tankard at his elbow—had soured on his stomach.

"Hey?" he began, frowning, as he broke the seal of my letter. "Are all General Waller's troopers in this condition? Or does he think it manners to send me a trumpeter in such trim?"

"My lord," said I, "your wine and my poor self have come by a roundabout road, and on the way have been tapped of a trifle."

"By whom, sir?"

"By certain of your men, my lord."

"I'll hang 'em for it, then."

"I thank you, my lord; but for that you must treat with General Waller." And I told him the tale, or so much of it as I thought was good for him.

At the close he eyed me awhile angrily, with his brows drawn down.

"You are an impudent knave, sir, to stand and tell me this to my face. Look ye here, Bolle"—he swung round upon the colonel, who had put forth a

hand as though to arrest this unseemly abuse. "How do I know that this dog has not tampered with the wine? By God!" he broke out as a servant entered with a stoup of it, "I'll not drink it—I'll not drink a drop of it—until this fellow has first tasted it, here, in our presence."

I believe that I went white: but 'twas with rage. "Give me a glass of it," I answered; and, as the servant filled and handed to me, "The wine, my lord, came on your own petition and at your own risk, as I must remind you. Nevertheless, I will drink—to your long life, and better manners." I drank, set down the glass, and asked, after a pause, "May I go, my lord?"

"You may go to the devil!"

I hesitated. "There was, as I remember, some little mention of an ox——"

"You may tell your master to come and fetch it," he growled.

Well, my master did fetch it, and with speed. That same night he assembled five thousand men without beat of drum in the park at Farnham, and at seven o'clock we marched off towards Basing. On the way to Crondall, we of the horse halted for an hour to let the foot regiments catch up with us, and all together headed down upon Alton. In this way, at nine in the morning, we came down upon the west of

the town, while the earl kept watch on the roads to the eastwards; and charged at once.

I say that the earl kept watch; but in truth he had put this duty upon his captains, while he still fuddled himself with our general's sack. He and his horse never gave fight, but galloped before us on the road to Winchester; along which, after close on an hour's chase, our trumpets recalled us as our infantry forced the doors of Alton Church, and cut up Colonel Bolle's regiment that still resisted there. The Earl of Crawford left a good half of his wine behind, and two days later our general, who had sent for me, showed me this letter—

"To Sir W. Waller.

"SIR,—I hope your gaining of Alton cost you dear. It was your lot to drink of your own sack, which I never intended to have left for you. I pray you favour me so much as to send me your own chirurgeon, and upon my honour I will send you a person suitable to his exchange.—Sir, your servant,

"CRAWFORD."

From this happy success it was my fortune, that same afternoon, to lead our troop back to Farnham. Coming on the way to the entrance of a lane on our right, I avoided the high-road for the by-path. It twisted downhill to the river, crossed it, and by-and-by in a

dip of the farther slope, brought me in sight of a round cottage of two storeys. No smoke arose from it, though the twilight was drawing in upon a frost that searched our bones as we rode. No inhabitant showed a face. But I waved a hand in passing, and I am mistaken if a hand did not respond from the upper storey—by drawing a shutter close.

RED VELVET

August, 1644. *The Story is told by Ralph Medhope, Captain of the Twenty-second (or Grey-coat) Troop of Horse in the Parliament Army, then serving in Cornwall.*

We were eight men in the piquet. My cornet, Ned Penkevill, rode beside me; our trumpeter, Israel Hutson, a pace or two behind; with five troopers following. I could tell you their names, but there is no need, for I alone of the eight come into the story. The rest rode to their death that night, and met it in the dawn, like men.

We rode northward and inland along the downs high over the left bank of the Fowey River; with good turf and heather underfoot, and with the moon behind our right shoulders. She was the harvest moon, now in her last quarter, and from her altitude I guessed it, by west country time, to be well past four of the morning or within an hour of daybreak. But because she hung bright up here, we pricked forward warily, using every pit and hollow. We had left our breast-pieces, back-pieces, and gorgets behind us, with Penkevill's standard, for the main troop to

carry; and rode in plain grey jerkins—bareheaded too, since on mounting the rise above the valley-fog we had done off our morions (for fear of the moonlight) and hidden them in a furze-brake, where belike next summer the heather-bees found and made hives of them.

Fog, rolling up from the sea—seven or eight miles away—filled all the valley below us: and this fog was the reason of our riding. For the valley formed the neck of a trap in which the King held our general with two thousand five hundred horse, six thousand infantry, and I know not how many guns. His own artillery lined the heights under which we rode—that is, to left or east of the river; he had pushed across a couple of batteries to the opposite hills, and between them easily commanded the valley. It was just the ease of it that made him careless and gave us our chance. He had withdrawn the better part of his horse to the coast, to make a display against our scattered base; and our general, aware of this, was even meditating an assault on the heights when the sudden fog changed his plans and he resolved to march his horse, under cover of it, straight through the trap. The risk, to be sure, was nearly desperate; since, for aught he knew, the King was marching back his troops under the same cover, and to be caught in that narrow valley (which was plashy, moreover, and in places flooded) would mean the total loss of his

cavalry. Yet he had spoken cheerfully when I took leave of him and rode off with my seven men—our business being to watch along the enemy's lines for any movement, to sound a warning if necessary, and, if surprised or caught, so to behave as to lead suspicion away from the movement of the main body.

The enemy kept loose watch up here. We could see his camp-fires dotted on the ridge between us and the dark woods of Boconnock, where the owls hooted; but either we were lucky or his outposts had been carelessly set. Clearly no alarm had reached these encampments. But Heaven knew what might be happening, or preparing to happen, in the valley. There at any moment the report of a single musket might tell us that all was lost.

Penkevill—a good lad—insisted that all was well. Our men had been due to start at two o'clock, and all delay allowed for, by this time they should be past the gut of the valley, where an opposing force would certainly choose to post itself.

My answer to this was that, even allowing it, we must wait for the sound of fighting at Respryn Bridge, farther up the vale, or at one of the two fords a little below it. For there, and there only, could our men cross the river, as they must to hit off any line of escape through Liscard and into Devon. The bridge we knew to be held by a guard, and almost to a certainty the fords, though swollen by recent rains,

would be watched also. It was a part of the plan to surprise and force these crossings, and no question but that—unless their guard had been strengthened—they could be forced. But as certainly the guard, however weak, would make at least some show of fight; so certainly, indeed, that the sound of firing here was to announce success and be our signal to rejoin the main body.

Now from this bridge of Respryn a highway climbs from the valley and runs due east across the downs; that is to say, straight athwart the track we were holding; and our orders were on no account to cross this highway, but to halt at some little distance on the near side of it, place ourselves in cover, and so await the signal. For the enemy held it—we could spy a couple of their camp-fires on the rise where it crosses Five Barrow Hill, with a third somewhat nearer, by the cross lanes called Grey Mare—and it would assuredly be patrolled. If in attempting to cross it we fell foul of the patrol, the alarm might draw their troops down towards the bridge; and again, if we crossed it without mishap, we should be no better placed and might easily overshoot our mark, for somewhere alongside this road our general would direct his retreat, over the heather and short turf that stretched for miles ahead and for a mile or more on either hand—fair open country and for cavalry the best in the world.

Accordingly we found cover in a belt of fir trees overlooking the valley, and for a while possessed our souls in patience. We were early, having come without mishap or challenge, and to expect a like speed of two thousand five hundred men—riding in thick fog through water-meadows, with ditches to be crossed and gates to be found and passed—was in the last degree unreasonable. Nevertheless, dawn could not be far off, and as the minutes dragged by, my spirits sank and my thoughts ran on a score of possible disasters.

By-and-by the sky began to pale. We heard a small troop of horsemen coming down the road at a walk—a patrol perhaps, or perhaps they were riding down to relieve the guard by the bridge. We listened and made out their number to be twenty or thereabouts. The wind had shifted—another good reason for keeping on our side of the road—and blew from them to us; but our horses were well trained. The troop drew level with our hiding; we could hear the jingling of their bits, and with that came our signal. A couple of pistol shots rang out; they made every man of us start in his saddle, and they were followed by a volley.

In my surprise I had dug spur and pushed out beyond our clump of firs, almost before it struck me that the sound came not from the valley but from ahead of us, across the road and some way up the

slope. My first motion had been to charge the troopers in the roadway, to drive them (or at least to check them) from helping at the bridge; and I had done more wisely by holding to it, even upon second thought, for they had wheeled towards the sound and so gave their backs to us. While they stood thus we might have charged through them, and all had been well.

As it was, they offered us this chance for a moment only; and then, striking spur, scrambled up the bank on the far side of the road and headed across the turf at a gallop. We looked, and slowly we understood. For half a mile away, up the rise of the downs, a broad dark shadow was moving; and we had scarcely discerned it before, in the pale of the dawn, small points of light wavered and broke upon morions, gorgets, cuirasses. That moving shadow was our own main body, climbing the hill at a gentle trot.

A few piqueters hung on their rear. It was these, of course, that had given the alarm: and by-and-by the trumpets taking it up on Five Barrow Hill, a body of four hundred horse came over the rise at a gallop and bore down obliquely on the mass—very confidently at first: but at closer quarters it lost heart and started off to harass the right flank of the solid mass, that paid it little attention and held on its way without swerving.

Before this we had put our horses in motion, to

overtake the patrol (as I will call it) and break through to join our comrades. But here it was that our delay proved fatal. For turning at the sound of our gallop, and belike judging us to be the advance-guard of a second large body of horse, the leader of the patrol wheeled his men about, halted them for a moment, and so charged them straight down upon us. In numbers they were more than two to one, with the advantage of the slope, and albeit we fought fiercely for a minute, they broke us and drove us back headlong on the road. Nor did they stop here, but, having us on the run, headed us right down the road to the bridge.

Here, at the bridge-head, finding it unguarded, I managed to wheel about and beat off a couple of pursuers: and Israel Hutson and one of the troopers joining me, we three blocked the passage and could not be dislodged. For the bridge was extremely narrow; so narrow, indeed, that in either parapet the builders had provided an embrasure here and there, for the foot-traveller to step aside if he should meet a passing waggon.

The cavaliers, confronted by this remnant of us, and still perhaps believing that we counted on support, drew off some thirty yards, and were plainly in two minds whether to attack us again or to drop the business and ride back towards the trumpet-calls now sounding confusedly along the crest of the downs;

when, to their and our worse dismay, was heard a pounding of hoofs on the road behind us, and over the bridge at our backs came riding a rabble of mounted men with a woman at their head—a woman dressed all in scarlet with a black flapping hat and a scarlet feather. What manner of woman she was I had no time to guess. But she rode with uplifted arm, grasping a pistol and waving the others forward; and her followers—who in no way resembled soldiers—poured after her, shouting, clearly bent on our destruction.

I had managed to recharge my two pistols; and now, thrusting one into my belt and grasping the other, with my sword dangling handy on a wrist-knot, I dismounted and slipped into the nearest embrasure, there to sell my life as dearly as might be. As I did so I heard, above the pounding of hoofs, five or six shots fired, and saw Hutson fling up his arms in the act of dismounting, fall his length across the roadway, and lie still under the feet of my own terrified horse. The trooper made a plunge forward as if to hurl himself through the patrol; and they, no doubt, disposed of him. I never saw him again.

For me, I faced upon the new assailants, as the spitting of bullets on the parapet directed me, and found little time to wonder what manner of people these were who so plainly intended to murder me. Some rode on cart-horses; one or two flourished

pitchforks; and if ever a man had a sense of taking his leave of life in a nightmare it was I during that next minute. It seemed that a dozen were on me. I cannot remember letting off my second pistol; but for some time, with my back to the angle of the embrasure, I held my own with almost astonishing ease, and might have held it for many minutes—my opponents being more savage than skilful—had not one of them barbarously hurled his pitchfork at me as a man throws a spear. One point of it pierced and stuck in the upper muscles of my left arm; the other pricked pretty sharply upon a rib; and the pain of this double stroke forced me to drop my sword and make a snatch at the accursed missle, to pluck it out. 'Twas the work of two seconds at most, and then with a jerk upon the wrist-knot I had the sword hilt again in my grip; but it let three stout ruffians in upon me to finish me. And this they were setting about with a will when, as I beat up a stroke that threatened to cleave my skull, I heard a voice calling on them to hold, and the lady in scarlet forced her horse between us. As the brute's shoulder pressed me back into the angle of my embrasure she held out her pistol at arm's length, her finger on the trigger, and pointed it at close quarters full on my face.

"You are my prisoner."

I stared up and along the pistol barrel and met her eyes. They looked down on me disdainfully, with

no mercy in them, but (it seemed to me) a certain curiosity. A slight frown puckered her brows. She had spoken in a cold, level voice, and if her colour was pale, her manner and bearing showed no trace of agitation.

"Would seem," said I, "there is no choice. I submit, madam—to your pleasure, but not to the rabble you lead."

At this her eyebrows lifted a little. "A gentleman?" I heard her say, but rather to herself than to me.

"To the extent," I answered, "of having a distaste for pitchforks."

She made no reply to this, but turned about on her men who were murmuring and calling to one another to cut my throat. "I think you heard me say that this officer is my prisoner. The man who forgets it I will have flogged and afterwards shot. And now stand back, if you please."

I had made a motion to hand her my sword, but she signed to me to keep it, and rode off towards the patrol, leaving the crowd to stare at me. Being unsure how far her authority prevailed with them, I stuck to my embrasure, and kept an eye lifting for danger, while I wiped, as carelessly as might be, the sweat from my forehead—for the work had been hot while it lasted. I had laid out a couple of these yokels in good earnest, and while their comrades

dragged them away and, propping them against the parapet opposite, called for water to bathe their wounds, I became unpleasantly sensible of my own hurts. The stab in my upper arm, though it bled little, kept burning as though the pitchfork had been dipped in poison; and from the less painful scratch on the ribs I was losing blood; I could feel it welling under my shirt, and running warm down the hollow of my groin. Loss of blood, they say, will often clarify a man's eyesight and quicken his other faculties; or it may be that, as the morning sun ate up what remained of the fog, all around me—the bridge and the persons upon it, the trees up the valley, the river tumbling between—on a sudden grew distinct to the view. At any rate, in my memory, as out of a blurred print, springs the apparition of my lady as she came riding back from her parley with the patrol, with the sunlight on her flaming feather and habit of red velvet, and her horse's shadow moving clear-cut along the granite parapet. Nay, it seemed that her voice, too, had a sharper edge as she spoke to me.

"I have explained to the captain, yonder, that you are my prisoner. Which is your horse?—the dark bay, I think." For they had captured mine as well as poor Hutson's, and a servant held the pair by the bridge-end.

"It is, madam."

She motioned to the man to lead him forward. "Now mount," she said; "and follow me, if you please. You may keep your sword."

Mounting, to a man in my plight, was no such easy matter; but she had walked forward to give some directions about the wounded men, and did not perceive the pain it cost me. Yet (I told myself) she must have seen me take my wound; and her indifference angered me. Having mounted and found my stirrups, I shut my teeth hard.

"Are you ready?" she asked, glancing back over her shoulder.

"At your service, madam."

Without another word or look she started at a brisk trot, which I forced my horse to copy, though it gave me the most discomfort of any she could have chosen; and at my heels rode three of her servants on great clattering cart-horses. The highway beyond the bridge rose with a gentle slope, much obscured by trees. Between them, a short distance up the hill, I caught sight of a lodge-gate, with a park and a fair avenue beyond it; but of these I had no more than a glimpse, for almost at once my lady led us off to the right and along a rutted cart-track, black with the mould of rotted leaves, that wound up the valley bottom and close alongside of the river. The sun was high enough by this to pierce through the foliage of elms and alders overhanging the stream

and dapple the scarlet habit ahead of me with pretty spots and patterns of shadow; but not yet high enough to reach the low-lying summer-leases (as they would be called in my county) by which the river curved. And here were cattle, yet half-awake, heaving themselves out of their lairs to stretch themselves and begin to browse. The war had not touched this part of the valley; and but for a shot or two fired now and again on the distant hidden hills, we might have deemed it a hundred miles removed. Nay, we had ridden scarcely six furlongs before we came on an old man angling. His back was towards us, and he did not turn to spare us so much as a look.

The cart-track, though here and there it descended close to the brink and crossed a plashet left by the late floods, held the most of its course partly level, and some twenty feet above the river. So we rode for a mile, and came in sight of a second bridge, newer and more massive than the first, for it carried one of the main highways of the county. Here also at the confluence of two streams the valley widened, and as we emerged on the highway out of the gloom my eyes rested on a broad grassy park sloping up from the bridge, and crowned with terraces and a noble house.

The entrance to this park lay but a gunshot up the road on our left; and, coming to it, my lady drew rein.

"Your name?" she asked.

"Medhope."

"It is singular that I should have found a gentleman," said she, in a musing, half-doubtful voice, as I leaned from my saddle, stifling the pain, and unhasped the gate for her.

Said I drily, "The Parliament army, madam, includes a few of us. I know not why you should press this point: and 'faith you took me without waiting for credentials; but if it please you I am even a poor knight of the shire."

"My husband is fortunate," said she; and put her horse to the trot again.

While yet I pondered what she might mean by this—for she said it without the ghost of a smile—we reached the house and rode into a great empty back-court, where nevertheless was the main entrance—an arched doorway with a broad flight of steps. Here she slipped from her saddle, commanded me to alight, and gave my horse over to our escort, to lead him to stable. Signing to me, she led the way up the steps, and I followed, half-dizzy with loss of blood. The great door stood open. We passed into a cool hall, paved with lozenges of polished granite, white and black; and through this, with a turn to the left, down a long corridor similarly paved and hung with tapestries. To the right of this corridor were many doors, of which she led me past five or

six, and then pausing at one for me to overtake her, pushed it open.

The room within was of goodly size, and flooded with the morning sunshine that poured through three long windows. In the midst of it stood a table laid for breakfast, and at the head of the table, backed by a sideboard loaded with cold meats, sat a man plying knife and fork, and with a flagon handy beside him—a heavy, broad-shouldered man, with a copper-red complexion, and black hair that grew extraordinarily low upon his forehead. This and a short, heavy jaw gave him a morose, sullen look. I guessed his age at something near thirty.

The sight of us standing in the doorway appeared to annoy him. He scowled for a moment at my lady, and dropped his eyes, while (as it seemed to me) a rush of angry blood suffused his face and gave it a purplish tint; but anon lifted and fixed them on me with a stare that as plainly as words demanded my business. My lady also turned to me.

"This," she said, "is my husband, Sir Luke Glynn." She faced about on him. "I have brought you here Captain Medhope, an officer of the rebel army, to take what repayment you are ready to give. He is, I may warn you, a good swordsman."

Whatever she meant by this, she said it coldly, and as coldly kept her eyes on him awaiting his answer. Still avoiding them he continued to stare

at me, and presently, pushing aside his tankard, leaned back in his chair with a rough laugh.

"My good Kate," said he brutally, "I took you at least for a sportswoman." Still leaning back he pointed towards me. "Your friend is hurt, wherever you found him. Better ring for Pascoe and put him to bed."

"Hurt?" she echoed, and turned to me, where I stood swaying, with a hand on the table's edge, and a face (I dare say) as white as the diapered cloth. Her eyes rested on me at first incredulously, then with dismay.

"It is not serious," I stammered. "If some one will set a chair for me—no, not there—clear of the rug. My boots are full of blood, I think."

With this I must have fallen in a faint, straight into her arms, and the faint must have lasted a few minutes. For when my senses came back some one had removed my jack-boots and stockings, and a hand had opened my shirt wide at the breast and found the wound. The hand was Lady Glynn's; and on the other side of me stood her husband with a goblet of wine, some of which he had managed to coax down my throat.

The wine doubtless had revived me, yet not so that I noted all this at once or distinctly. For the while I lay back with closed eyes, and heard—as it were in a dream—my host and hostess talking together.

"A scratch, as you see," said Lady Glynn. "There is no need to send for a surgeon—who belike would only take blood from him: and he has lost enough already. A few hours' rest—if, when I have bathed the wound, you and Pascoe will carry him upstairs——"

"You are considerate, truly," he answered. "No doubt, having hired your bully, you wish to make the best of him. But—I put it to you—in asking *me* to nurse him you overshoot my Christian virtue."

"I think not," she corrected him in a cool, level voice. "That is, if you will consider him for what he is, the messenger of your honour. For the rest, he happens to be no bully but a gentleman—though I confess," she added, "this comes to you by purest luck: I had no time to pick or choose. Lastly, I have not hired him; but——"

"But what?" he asked, as she came to a deliberate pause.

"But, if you force me to it, I may try."

What she meant by this I, lying between them with closed eyes, could not guess: but I suppose that, meeting her look, he understood.

"You?" he said at length, hoarsely. "You?" he repeated, and broke out with a furious oath. "No, by ——, Kate, you can't mean it! You can't—it's not like you . . . there, take your hand from him, or I'll slit his throat, there, as he lies!"

But her hand, though it trembled, rested still on my breast, above the wound. "If you lay hand on him, I go straight to the King; and if you hurt me, I have provided that a letter reaches the King. You are trapped every way, husband; and—and let us have no violence, please, for here comes Pascoe at last with the hot water."

It had cost me some self-command to keep my eyes closed during this talk. I opened them as a grey-headed servant came bustling in with a steaming pan. For just a second they encountered Lady Glynn's. Perhaps some irregular pulse of the heart —she had not withdrawn her hand—or some catch in my breathing warned her in the act of turning. She gazed down on me as if to ask how much I had heard: but almost on the instant motioned to the old man to come close.

"Have you a sponge?" she asked.

"It is in the pan, my lady."

She took it, rinsed it twice or thrice to make sure the water was not too hot, and fell to bathing my wound. Her hand was exquisitely light; the sense of the warm water delicious; and again I closed my eyes. But in this exchange of glances my previous image of her had somehow faded or been transformed, and with a suddenness that to this day I cannot account for. To be sure I had formed it in haste and amid the distractions of a pretty sharp combat. On the way to

the house she had kept well ahead—and drawn rein but to converse with me for less than half a minute. Only once—as she came riding back across the bridge from her parley with the patrol—had I taken stock (as you might say) of her looks; and, even so, my eyes had been occupied with her scarlet habit and feather, her bearing, her seat in the saddle, and the tone in which she spoke her commands, rather than with her actual features. That these were handsome I had certainly noted: but that I had noted them more particularly at the time I only discovered now, and by contrast.

Here, too, I should say that my age was forty-five and a trifle over; and that all my life I have been (as my comrades have often assured me) strangely insensible to the charms of women and indifferent to their good looks; and I tell this not because I am proud of it—for Heaven knows I am not—but that the reader may put no misconstruction, even a passing one, upon the rest of my story. I never for a moment stood in danger of loving Lady Glynn, as she never for a moment stood in danger of liking me. But I pitied her; and by virtue of this pity I was able to do for an hour or two what I had never done before and have never since tried or wished or cared to do again—to see clearly into a woman's mind.

But this came later. For the present, lying there while she sponged my wound, I saw only that she was

a great deal younger than I had deemed; and not only young but in distress; and not only distressed but in some sort helpless. In short, here was a woman so unlike the termagant who had charged across the bridge that I could hardly reconcile the two or believe them to be one.

The sponging over, the old man Pascoe handed her a bandage and, at a sign from her, lifted my shoulders a little while she passed it under my back. To do this her two arms must needs go around my body under the shirt: and I fancy that the sight drove her husband well-nigh past control: for he growled like a dog and I heard a splash of wine fall on the floor from the goblet he was still holding.

He obeyed, however, and gave me his arm—albeit sulkily—when commanded to help me upstairs: and although 'twas done on an impulse and with no thought of mischief, I did not improve his temper by pausing in the doorway and casting a look back at his lady. She was kneeling by the pan, rinsing out the sponge; and with her back towards us. She did not turn, and so my look went unrewarded; yet—though this must have been merest fancy—her attitude strengthened my certainty that she was in distress and in need of help.

In the great tapestried bedroom to which the two men conveyed me Sir Luke's demeanour changed, and in a fashion at first puzzling. Having laid me on the

bed and taken my assurance that I rested easily, he sent Pascoe off for a cup of wine and a manchet of bread, and, while these were being fetched, hung aimlessly about the room, now walking to and fro with his hands in his pockets, and anon halting to stare out of window. By-and-by Pascoe brought the tray, set it on a small table beside the bed, and retired. Sir Luke made as if to follow him, but paused at the door, shut it, and, coming back, stood gloomily frowning at me across the bed's foot.

"Where did my wife pick you up?" he asked.

"On the bridge," I answered, "where a mob—as I take it, of your retainers—were having at me with pitchforks as a prelude to cutting my throat."

"Was this your first meeting?"

I opened my eyes upon him, with a lift of the brows. "Yes," said I quietly, as though marvelling why he asked it. I think he had the grace to feel abashed. At any rate he lowered his eyes; nor though he lifted them presently did he seem able to fix them upon mine.

"You were some sort of rearguard, I suppose? They tell me the main body of your horse rode clean through and escaped. Do you happen to know what became of Chester?"

"Chester?" I echoed.

"He commanded our post at the bridge, as I understand. . . . When I say 'ours' 'tis from habit

merely. In the early part of the campaign I led a troop, but withdrew from his Majesty's service more than a month ago, not being able to stomach Dick Grenville. You know Dick Grenville?"

"By repute."

"But not Chester? . . . Chester was at one time his led-captain: but they have quarrelled since, and it looks as if——"

He did not finish the sentence, but left me to guess what remained.

"You mean," said I, "it looks as if Chester sold the pass? Well, if he did, I know nothing about it, or about him. This is the first I have heard of him. But speaking at a venture, I should say that either his neck's in a halter or he has changed sides and is riding off with our troops."

Sir Luke nodded, but said nothing; and after a while strode to the window. When he spoke again it was with his back turned to me.

"I wonder," he said, "my fellows didn't kill you out of hand."

"They were making a plaguey near bid for it," I answered; "but Lady Glynn interposed."

"And that's the strange part of the business. All rebels, as a rule, are poison to her. . . . As for me, you understand, a man on campaign picks up a sort of feeling for the enemy. He gets to see that all the right's not on one side, nor all the wrong on t'other.

I dare say, now, that your experience is much the same?" I did not answer this and after a pause he went on, still staring out of window, "I believed in the Lord's Anointed, for my part: but allowing, for argument's sake, the right's on that side, there's enough villainy and self-seeking mixed up with it to poison an honest man. . . . I shouldn't wonder now that there's something to be said even for Chester."

"That hardly seems possible," said I, wondering what his drift might be.

"I don't know. Wait till you've heard his side of the case. . . . But to go back to our subject—you see I don't bear you any malice: I am out of this quarrel, and—saving my lady's obstinacy—I don't see—I really don't see why I should billet myself with his Majesty's prisoners. What's more, I have an estate in the east of the county, a little this side of Plymouth. They quartered a troop of your fellows upon it last year, and the place, I hear, is a wilderness. . . . If I could get to it, or to Plymouth—well, one good turn deserves another, eh?—that is, if you're fit to travel?"

I think that at this point he faced around and eyed me for the first time. But I made show that I had dropped asleep. I heard him swear under his breath, and half a minute later he left the room.

He had been offering me escape. But why? I turned his words over, and the more I turned them the less I liked them. He had given me a suspicious

number of openings to prove that the right lay with my party. It seemed to me that, on half a hint, this man meant to desert. Yes, and his wife—I recalled her words—held him in some trap. And yet, recalling her face, I could not shake off the fancy that she, rather than he, stood in need of help.

Pondering all this, still with my eyes closed, I dropped asleep in good earnest.

I awoke from a sleep of many hours, to see old Pascoe standing at the bed's foot. No doubt his entrance had disturbed me.

He carried my boots in one hand, a can of hot water in the other, my stockings and a clean shirt across his arm; and he announced that the hour was four o'clock, and at half-past four Sir Luke and his lady would be dining. If I felt myself sufficiently recovered, they desired the pleasure of my company.

I sat upright on the bed. My head yet swam, but sleep had refreshed me, and a pull at the wine—which had stood all this while untasted—set me on pretty good terms with myself. I bade the old man carry my compliments to his lady and tell her that I will thankfully do her pleasure. "But first," said I, "you must stand by and see me into a clean shirt."

He did more. The stab in my upper arm had bled a little, and the shirt-sleeve could not be pulled from it without pain. He drew a pair of scissors from his

side-pocket and cut the linen away from around the wound: and then, having noted my weakness, helped me to wash and dress, drew on stockings and boots for me, nor left me until he had buckled on my sword-belt, and then only with an excuse that he must change his coat before waiting at table. Sir Luke and Lady Glynn (he assured me) would be by this time awaiting me in the dining-room.

Sure enough I found them there, my lady standing by the midmost window and gazing down upon the park, Sir Luke by the fireplace with an arm resting on the high mantel-ledge and one muddied boot jabbing at the logs of a new-made fire till the flame roared up the chimney. I wondered what madness could command so huge a blaze in the month of August (albeit 'twas the last of the month), until he turned and I saw that he had been drinking heavily.

It seemed that Lady Glynn had not heard me enter, for as I paused, a little within the doorway, she leaned forward without turning and pushed open a lattice of the window. I supposed that she did this to abate the heat of the fire in the room. But no; she was leaning and listening to the sound of guns far in the west. The sound—I had heard it in my sleep and again at intervals while dressing—broke heavily on the mist that damped the panes and drifted through the opening with a breeze that set the curls waving

about her neck and puffed out the silken shawl she had drawn around her naked shoulders.

Sir Luke looked up, and was the first to catch sight of me.

"Hear the guns?" he said. "Your foot hasn't the luck of your horse. The King caught 'em, drove 'em back over Lestithiel bridge, and has been keeping 'em on the run all day, pressing 'em t'wards the coast."

"Is that the report?" I asked.

"That's my report," he answered; "and"—thrusting forward one bemired boot—"you may count on it. I've been following and watching the fun."

By this time Lady Glynn had turned and came past her husband to greet me, without throwing him a look.

"You are the better for your rest?" she asked. "At least I see that, though wounded, you have contrived to pay me the compliment of wearing fresh linen and a clean pair of boots."

This was awkward, and—what was worse—she said it awkwardly, with a sprightliness, gracious yet affected, that did not become her at all. She meant, of course, to annoy her husband, and his face showed that she had succeeded. He turned away to the fire with a sulky frown, while she stood smiling, holding out a hand to me.

I touched it respectfully, and let it drop. "The credit," said I, "belongs all to your servant Pascoe."

"And here he is," she took me up gaily, as Pascoe appeared in the doorway. "Is dinner ready?"

"To be served at once, my lady."

"Then will you lead me to my seat, Captain Medhope? Yours is beside me, on the right; yes, close there. My husband, at his end, can enjoy the fire."

We took our seats. I was hungry, and the dinner good. I ate of everything, but can only recall an excellent grill of salmon and a roast haunch of venison: the reason being that Lady Glynn kept me in continued talk. Poor lady!—I had almost said, poor child!—for her desperate artlessness became the more apparent to me the more she persisted. Even I, who, as the reader has been told, have the smallest skill in the ways of women, could see that here was one, of high breeding but untutored, playing at a game at once above and beneath her; almost as far above her achieving as it lay beneath her true contempt. She knew that women can inveigle men; but in the practice of it I am very sure that her dairymaid could have given her lessons.

But what am I saying? Her poor coquetries did not deceive me, but she never meant them to deceive me. They accomplished, after all, just that for which she intended them. They deceived and maddened her half-drunken lout of a husband. Her dress, too, was something shameless. She wore above her scarlet

skirt (which I verily believe was the same she had ridden in) a bodice of the same bright colour, low as a maid-of-honour's, that displayed her young neck and bust. About her neck she had fastened a string of garnets. She had loaded her fingers with old-fashioned rings, of which the very dullness made me wince to see them employed in this sorry service. And I guessed that before my entrance this unusual finery had provoked her husband to fury.

A length of table lay between us and him. He sat silent, regarding us under lowered brows, eating little, draining glass after glass. Angry though he was, her voice seemed to lay a spell on him. She talked of a thousand things, but especially of the Parliament campaign, plying me with question after question—of our numbers, our discipline, our hardships during the past three weeks, of our general's plan of escape, and, in particular, of the part I had borne in it. And when I answered she listened with smiles, as though King and Parliament lay balanced in her affections. And this was the termagant that a few hours ago had ridden us down and trampled across poor Hutson's body!

All this I took at its true value, answering her with steady politeness, telling myself that as her purpose was to goad her husband, so no word of mine should give him an excuse for an outbreak. It takes two to make a quarrel, they say. But when three are

mixed up in it (and one a woman), the third cannot always count on remaining passive.

I had managed to tide over the meal with fair success. We had reached the dessert, and Pascoe (whose presence may have laid some restraint upon his master) had withdrawn. A dish of pears lay before Lady Glynn, and she asked me to peel one for her. I know not if this simple request laid the last straw on Sir Luke's endurance, but he filled his glass again and said with brutal insolence—

"You are fortunate, Captain Medhope, in exciting my wife's interest. I assure you that until your gallantry bewitched her, she had been used to speak of all rebels as cowards in grain."

"I hope, Sir Luke," said I, "you, with experience of us, have tried to teach her better."

"In faith, no," he replied yet more brutally, backing his sneer with a laugh. "I saw no reason for that."

"And yet," said I deliberately, peeling my pear, "you told me to-day that something might be said even for such a man as your friend Chester."

He jumped up with an oath. Yet I believe he might even now have restrained himself had not his wife—and with a face as pale as a ghost's—laid a hand on my arm.

"I had forgotten your wound," she said, ignoring her husband. "You handle the knife awkwardly. Let me cut the fruit and we will share."

With a turn of the hand Sir Luke hurled back his chair, and it fell with a crash.

"By God, Kate! if you have hired this man, he shall murder first and do his love-making afterwards. Nay, but I'll stop that, too. Look first to yourself, madame!"

He had whipped out his sword and was actually running upon her before I could get mine clear. But I was in time to beat down his point and then—for he was slow-witted and three-parts drunk—with a trick of wrist that luckily required little strength, I disarmed him. His sword struck the farther edge of the table, smashed a decanter of wine and dropped to the floor.

We were standing now, all three; Lady Glynn a little behind my elbow.

"Are you going to kill him?" she asked, and he heard.

For a moment he stared at her stupidly, then at the stream of wine running across the table, then back at her—and, so staring, flung up both hands and plunged forward. His brow, as he fell like an ox, thudded against the chair from which, a moment since, she had arisen.

I caught up a candle. But she was before me and had dropped on her knees beside him. In his fall he had rolled over on his side, and for a moment I supposed her to be busy loosening his collar. But

no—as I held the candle close she was feeling in his pockets, and in the light of it she held up a bunch of keys.

"I am glad you did not kill him," she said simply, rising from her knees. "There was no need."

"No need?" I repeated stupidly, swaying with weakness.

"You shall see."

She slipped by me and from the room. I bent and loosened Sir Luke's collar, and essayed to lift him, but had to relinquish the effort and drop into a chair, where I sat staring at the fallen wreck. While I stared, still dizzy, I heard the voice of old Pascoe behind me.

"We can manage it, sir—I think—between us." He stepped past me, and together we lifted his master and staggered with him to a couch, where he lay, breathing hard.

Pascoe motioned me back to my chair, where I sat and panted.

While I sat, she came back. I did not hear her approach, but only her voice whispering to me to come: and I followed her forth from the room and out into the corridor, and along the corridor to the porch as a man walking in his sleep.

There was a lantern by the porch, and in the light of it my horse stood, saddled and ready.

"You will take the road up the valley," she said,

"and cross by the second bridge. The road beyond that bears due east and is unguarded."

"But what is this?" I asked, as I put a hand to the pommel of the saddle and felt something hard and heavy slung there beside it.

"It is the price of the pass, or half of it. There is another bag on the off side, and between them they hold, I believe, six hundred pounds."

"That was his price?"

"That was the price. And now go: take it back to your general."

"You must help me to mount," said I.

She helped me to mount.

"The second bridge, you will remember," said she, as I found my stirrups.

"I will remember. Is that all?"

"That is all: though, if you wish it, I will thank you and say that you have behaved well."

"I did not wish it," said I, "though now you have said it, I am glad. You hate me, I understand."

"And I thank you for understanding. Yes, you have behaved well."

"Good night, then, and God bless you!"

I shook rein and jogged out of the courtyard into the mirk and mist. I never saw her again.

Not till years later did I learn that she, too, had

left her husband's roof that night and after (it cannot be doubted) many adventures of which no history has reached me, joined the Court in its exile at the Hague; where, as I am told, she died.

Her husband recovered and lived to accomplish his end by drink. There were whispers against him, but no certain proof that he had ever acted as intermediary in selling the pass. His defenders could always urge his notorious povetry. Before his death he had parted with more than two-thirds of his estate. There was no child to inherit the remainder.

To the end he asserted that his wife had run from him unfaithfully, and was pitied for it. So I hear, at least, and do not care; as I am sure she would not have cared. She had saved his honour, with my poor help, and having saved it, was quit of us both.

I pray the foreign earth may rest lightly on her.

THE JEW ON THE MOOR

The scene is the kitchen of a small farmhouse above the Walkham River, on the western edge of Dartmoor. The walls, originally of rough granite, have had their asperities smoothed down by many layers of whitewash. The floor is of lime-ash, nicely sanded. From the ceiling—formed of rude, unplaned beams and the planching of the bedroom above—depends a rack crowded with hams and sides of bacon, all wrapped in newspapers. In the window a dozen geraniums are blooming, and beyond them the eye rests on the slope of Sharpitor and the distant ridge of Sheepstor. The fireplace, which faces the window, is deep and capacious, and floored with granite slabs. On these burns a fire of glowing peat, and over the fire hangs a crock of milk in process of scalding. In the ingle behind it sits the relator of this story, drying his knees after a Dartmoor shower. From his seat he can look up the wide chimney and see, beyond the smoke, the sky, and that it is blue again and shining. But he listens to the farmer's middle-aged sister, who stands at the table by the window, and rolls out a pie-crust as she talks. (The farmer is a widower, and she keeps house for him.) She talks of a small picture—a silhouette executed in black and gold—that adorns the wall-space between the dresser and the tall clock, and directly above the side-table piled with the

small library of the house. The portrait is a profile of a young man, somewhat noticeably handsome, in a high-necked coat and white stock collar.

"It is none of our family, though it came to us near on a hundred years ago. It came from America. A young gentleman sent it over from Philadelphia to my grandmother, with a letter to say he was married and happy, and would always remember her. Perhaps he did; and, again, perhaps he didn't. That was the last my grandmother heard of him.

"But it wasn't made in America. It was made in the War Prison, over yonder at Princetown, where they keep the convicts now. I've heard the man that drew and cut it out was a French sergeant, with only one arm. He had lost the other in the war, and his luck was to be left until the very last draft. He finished it the morning he was released, and he gave it to the young American—Adams, his name was—for a keepsake. The Americans had to stay behind, because their war wasn't over yet.

"It came to my grandmother in this way: She was married to my grandfather that owned this very farm, and lived in this very house; and twice a week she would drive over to the prison, to the market that used to be held there every day from before noon till nightfall. Sometimes my grandfather drove with her, but oftener not. She could take care of herself very well.

"She sold poultry and pork, eggs and butter and vegetables; lard sometimes, and straw, with other odds and ends. (The prisoners used the straw for plaiting bonnets.) Scores of salesmen used to travel to the prison every day, from Tavistock, Okehampton, Moreton, and all around the Moor: Jews, too, from Plymouth, with slop-clothing. But in all this crowd my grandmother held her own. The turnkeys knew her; the prisoners liked her for her good looks and good temper, and because she always dealt fair; and the agent (as they called the governor in those days) had given orders to set aside a table and trestles for her twice a week, close inside the entrance of the market square, on the side where the bettermost French prisoners lived in a building they called the Petty Caution.

"But with the prisoners, though many a time her heart melted for them, she was always very careful, and let it be known that she never smuggled tobacco or messages even for her best customers. After a while they got to understand this, and (though you may think it queer) liked her none the less. The agent, on his part, trusted her—and the turnkeys and the military officials—and didn't respect her the less because she never told tales, though they knew she might have told many.

"This went on, staid and regular, for close upon three years; and then, one fine October evening, my

grandmother, after reaching home with her little cart, unharnessing and bedding up the donkey in his stable, walked out to the orchard, where my grandfather was looking over his cider apples, and says she to him—

"'William, I've a-done a dreadful deed.'

"My grandfather took off his hat, and rubbed the top of his head. 'Good Lord!' he says. 'You don't tell me!'

"'I've helped a prisoner to escape,' says she.

"'Then we'm lost and done for,' says my grandfather. 'How did it come about?' And with that he waited a little, and said, 'Damme, my dear, if any other person had brought me this tale I'd have tanned his skin.' For I must tell you my grandfather and grandmother doted on one another.

"'I know you would,' said my grandmother, dismally. 'And I can't think how the temptation took me. But the poor creatur' was little more'n a boy —and there were a-something in the eyes of him——' She meant to say there was a-something that reminded her of her own eldest, that she had lost a dozen years before.

"I don't know whether my grandfather understood or whether he didn't. But all he said was, 'However did you contrive it?'

"'It came,' she said, 'of my takin' they six white rabbits to market. I sold mun all; and when they

were sold, and the hutch standin' empty——' My grandmother pulled out her handkerchief and dabbed her eyes.

"'You drove him out in the rabbit hutch?' asked my grandfather.

"'With a handful of straw between him and the bars,' she owned. 'He's nobbut a boy. You can't think how easy. And the look of him when he crep' inside——'

"'Where is he?' asked my grandfather.

"'Somewheres hangin' about the stable at this moment,' she told him, with a kind o' sob.

"So my grandfather went out to the back. He could not find the prisoner in the stable, but by-and-by he caught sight of him on the slope of the stubble field behind it. The poor lad had taken a hoe, and was pretending to work it, while he edged away in the dimmety light.

"'Hullo!' sings out my grandfather across the gate; and goes striding up the field to him. 'If I were you,' says he, 'I wouldn't hoe stubble; because that's a new kind of agriculture in these parts, and likely to attract notice.'

"'I was doin' my best,' twittered the prisoner. He was a delicate-lookin' lad, very white just now about the gills. 'I come from Marblehead,' he explained, 'and, bein' bred to the sea, I didn't think it would matter.'

"'It will, you'll find, if you persevere with it. But come indoors. We'll stow you in the cider-loft for to-night, after you've taken a bite of supper. And to-morrow—well, I'll have to think that out,' said my grandfather.

"For the next few hours he felt pretty easy. He and his wife had a good reputation with the agent, who would take a long time before suspecting them of any hand in an escape. The three ate their supper together in good comfort, though from time to time my grandfather pricked up his ears as though he heard the sound of a gun. But the wind blew from the south-west that night, and if a gun was fired the sound did not carry.

"When supper was done my grandmother made a suggestion that the lad, instead of turning out to the cider-loft, should sleep in the garret overhead; and my grandfather, after a look at the lad's face, shut his lips, and would not gainsay her, though—as in bed he couldn't help reminding her—it would be difficult to pass off a visitor in the garret, with two blankets, for a housebreaker.

"As it happened, though, they were not disturbed that night. But my grandfather, for thinking, took a very little sleep, and in the morning he went up to the garret with the best plan he could devise.

"'I've been turnin' it over,' he said, 'and there's

no road will help you across the Moor for days to come. You must bide here till the hue-an'-cry has blown over, and meantime the missus must fit up some disguise for you; but you must bide in bed, for a man can't step out o' this house, front or back, without bein' visible from all the tors around. So rest where you be, and I'll just dander down along t'wards Walkhampton, where the Plymouth road runs under Sharpitor, an' where I've been meanin' to break up a taty-patch this long time past. There's alway a plenty goin' and comin' 'pon the road, an' maybe by keepin' an eye open I'll learn what line the chase is takin'.'

"So my grandfather shouldered his biddick and marched off, down and across the valley, marked off his patch pretty high on the slope, and fell to work. Just there he could keep the whole traffic of the road under his eye, as well as the fields around his house; and for a moment it gave him a shock as he called to mind that in the only field that lay out of sight he'd left a scarecrow standing—in a patch that, back in the summer, he had cropped with peas for the agent's table up at the War Prison. To be sure, 'twasn't likely to mislead a search-party, and, if it did, why a scarecrow's a scarecrow; but my grandfather didn't like the thought of any of these gentry being near the house. If they came at all they might be minded to search further. So he determined

that when dinner-time came he would go back home and take the scarecrow down.

"The road (as I said) was always pretty full of traffic, coming and going between Plymouth and the War Prison. There were bakers' waggons, grocery vans, and vans of meat, besides market carts from Bickleigh and Buckland. My grandfather watched one and another go by, but made out nothing unusual until—and after he had been digging for an hour, maybe—sure enough he spied a mounted soldier coming up the road at a trot, and knew that this must be one of the searchers returning. In a minute more he recognized the man for an acquaintance of his, a sergeant of the garrison, and by name Grimwold, and hailed him as he came close.

"'Hullo! Is that you?' says the sergeant, reining up. 'And how long might you have been workin' there?'

"'Best part of an hour,' says my grandfather. 'What's up?'

"'There's a prisoner escaped, another o' those damned Yankees,' says the sergeant. 'I've been laying the alarm all the way to Plymouth. You ha'n't seen any suspicious-lookin' party pass this way, I suppose?'

"My grandfather said very truthfully that he hadn't, but promised very truthfully that he would keep an eye lifting. So the sergeant wished him good-day and rode on towards Two Bridges.

"For the next twenty minutes nothing passed but a tax-cart and a market woman with a donkey; and a while after them a very queer-looking figure hove in sight.

"'Twas a man walking, with a great sack on his shoulders and two or three hats on his head, one atop of another. By the cut of his jib, as they say, my grandfather knew him at once for one of the Plymouth Jews, that visited Princetown by the dozen with cast-off clothes for sale, and silver change for the gold pieces that found their way sometimes into the prison as prize-money. Sometimes, too, they carried away the Bank of England notes that the Frenchmen were so clever at forging. But though, as he came near, the man had Jew written all over him, my grandfather couldn't call to mind that he'd ever seen this particular Jew before.

"What is more, it was plain enough in a minute that the Jew didn't recognize my grandfather; for, catching sight of him aloft there on the slope, first of all he gave a start, next he walked forward a few steps undecided-like, and last he pulled up, set down his bundle like a man tired, and looked behind him down the road. The road was empty, so he turned his attention to my grandfather, and after looking at him very curiously for half a minute, 'Good morning,' says he.

"By this time my grandfather had guessed what

was passing in the man's mind, and it came into his own to have a little fun.

"'Good morning', stranger,' said he, through his nose, mimicking so well as he could the American manner of speaking.

"'How long have you been at work there, my man?' asks the Jew, still glancing up and down the road.

"'A long time,' answers my grandfather, putting on a scared look, and halting in his words. 'This piece of ground belongs to me'—which was true enough, but didn't sound likely; for he was always a careless man in his dress (the only matter over which he and my grandmother had words now and then), and to-day, feeling he had the whip hand of her, he had taken advantage to wear an old piece of sacking in place of a coat.

"'Oh, indeed,' says the Jew, more than dubious, and thinking, no doubt, of the three guineas that was the regular reward for taking an escaped prisoner.

"'It's the tarnal truth,' says my grandfather, and fell to whistling, like a man facing it out. But the tune he chose was 'Yankee Doodle!' This, of course, made the Jew dead sure of his man. But he was a lean little wisp of a man, and my grandfather too strongly built to be tackled. So the pair stood eyeing one another until, glancing up, my grandfather saw three soldiers come round the corner of the road from

Plymouth, and with that he dropped his biddick and turned like a desperate man.

"The Jew saw them too, and almost upon the same instant. 'Help, help!' he yelled, and leaving his bag where he had dropped it, tore down the road to meet the soldiers, waving both arms and still shouting, 'Help! A prisoner! A prisoner!'

"My grandfather always said afterwards that, when he heard this, he fairly groaned. He wasn't by any means humorous as a rule, and, so far as he was concerned, the joke had gone far enough; and he used to add as a warning that a man may go so far in a joke he can't help but go farther—'tis like hysterics with women. At any rate, he saw the soldiers coming for him at the double, spreading themselves to head him off, and as they came he broke and ran straight up the slope towards the head of the tor.

"This violent exercise didn't suit him at all, and glad enough he was, after two minutes of it, to note that the soldiers were shortening the distance hand over fist. For a moment he had a mind to drop, as though worn out with hunger and exhaustion, but his face and shape wouldn't lend themselves to that deceit. So he held on and did his best, until the foremost soldier drew within thirty yards and shouted out, threatening to fire. Turning and seeing that he had his musket almost at the 'present,' my

grandfather dropped his arms, stood still, and allowed them to take him like a lamb.

"'But,' said he, sulky-like, 'if 'tis to the prison you mean to carry me, then carry me you shall. Back to the road I'll go with you, but not a step farther on my own legs, and on that you may bet your last dollar.'

"The soldiers—they were three raw youngsters of the Somerset Militia—threatened at first to prick him along the road with their bayonets. But by this time the little Jew had come up panting and yet almost capering with excitement.

"'No bloodthed!' said he, in his lisping way. 'I'll have no bloodthed! The man 'ith worth three guineath to me ath he ith. He thall have a cart, if it cotht me five shillingth! Where 'th the neareth village?'

"He ran off and down the road, while my grandfather sat down on the turf along with the soldiers, and smoked a pipe of tobacco. Very nice lads they were, too; but he felt shy in their company, thinking how badly he had deceived them, and also that the joke was near running dry. For, whatever cart the Jew might hire, the driver couldn't help recognizing a man so widely known as my grandfather.

"But his luck stood yet. For the little man hadn't run above three-quarters of a mile on the road and was not half way towards Buckland—his nearest

chance of a cart—when he came full tilt upon a light waggon and three more soldiers, with a fourth riding behind, and all conveying the prisoners' weekly pocket-money up to Princetown, in sacks filled with small change. Here was a chance to save breath as well as carriage hire, and the little Jew charged down on them so fiercely, as they crawled up the hill, that the corporal who sat on the money with a musket across his knees, had nearly shot him for a highwayman before giving him time to explain.

"They whipped up the horses though, when they heard his story; and so, coming to the road under Sharpitor, and halting, they very soon had my grandfather trussed and laid upon the bags of money, and jogged away with him towards the Two Bridges, the Jew and three militiamen tramping behind at the cart-tail.

"It was one o'clock, or a little past, when they drove up to the prison gate; and a mist beginning to gather above North Hessary, as at this time of year it often does after a clear morning. My grandfather, looking out from under the tilt of the cart, felt as he'd never felt before what a cheerless place it must seem to a new-comer, and his heart melted a little bit further towards the lad he was hiding at home.

"'Hullo!' says the sentry at the gate.

"'You'll say something more than Hullo! when you see what we've got inside here,' promised the corporal.

"Then they bundled my grandfather out in the light of day, and the corporal proudly told the sentry to summon the agent at once.

"'Good Lord!' said the sentry, 'if it bain't Farmer Mugford!'

"Just then, as it happened, forth stepped the agent himself from the wicket, starting for his walk that he took for his health's sake every afternoon. Captain Sharpland his name was, and later on, when the Americans mutinied, he was accused of treating them harshly, but my grandfather said that a kinder-hearted man never stepped.

"'Hullo,' says Captain Sharpland, halting and putting up his eye-glass. 'Why, Mugford, whatever is the meaning of this?'

"'You'd best ask the Jew here, sir,' my grandfather answered, nursing his sulks.

"'If you pleathe, noble captain,' put in the Jew, who didn't yet guess anything amiss, 'we've thecured the ethcaped prithoner—after a tuthle——'

"'And pray, who the devil may you be?' asked Captain Sharpland, screwing his eye-glass into his eye. He disliked Jews, upon principle.

"'Tho pleathe you, noble captain, my name 'th Nathan Nathaniel, of Thouththide Thtreet, Plymouth:

and on my way thith morning, ath you thee, I came on the prithoner——'

"'Prisoner be——' began Captain Sharpland, but broke off to swear at the sentry, that was covering his face with his hands to hide his grins. 'My good Mr. Mugford, will *you* explain?'

"'With pleasure, sir,' my grandfather answered, and told his story, while the Jew's eyes grew wider and wider, and his jaw dropped lower and lower.

"'You claim compensation, of course?' said Captain Sharpland at the close, and as gravely as he could, though he too had to smooth a hand over his upper lip.

"'Why, as for that, sir'—my grandfather was taken aback—'I took it for a joke, and bear no grudge against Government for it.'

"'It wouldn't help you if you did,' said Captain Sharpland. 'But I suggest that Mr. Nathan, here, owes you a trifle—shall we put it at twenty pounds?'

"But here Mr. Nathan cast up his hands with a scream, and would have sat down in the roadway. The soldiers caught him, and held him upright, and you may guess if, in their temper at being fooled, they twisted his arms a bit.

"'Take him to my quarters, and we will discuss it,' commanded Captain Sharpland, turning back to the wicket again, and leading the way. Well, the Jew, when he reached the agent's quarters, rolled

on to his knees, and whined so long, beating down the price, that 'twas well after four o'clock before he counted out the five guineas which was the least sum Captain Sharpland would hear of. My grandfather counted them into his pocket, scarcely believing his good fortune. He stayed behind after the creature had slunk away out of the room—to have a laugh with the captain, who very heartily offered him a glass of grog upon the top of it; and with that it came over him how he was deceiving this good man. He couldn't accept the drink; he could scarcely muster up face to say 'Good night, sir, and thank you,' and if he, too, as he went out, didn't carry his tail between his legs, I doubt if he felt much better satisfied with himself than did Mr. Nathan.

"But just outside the gate he found something to distract his mind. The soldiers, in a rage at being made to look foolish, had been waiting there for Mr. Nathan with their belts; and my grandfather arrived in time to hear the wretched man howling for mercy, as they chivvied him away over the moor under the lee of North Hessary and into the dusk.

"He stood and listened for a minute or so, but by-and-by there was an end of the yells, and the soldiers came strolling back, laughing together, as men who had taken a pleasant little revenge but not pushed it too far. So he turned his face for home, and reached it a little after nightfall; and

there he turned out his pocket in front of my grandmother, who could not believe a word of the tale until she had handled each guinea separately. Then she, too, flung her apron over her head, and laughed till she was weak. But my grandfather wanted to know if by rights he oughtn't to share the money with the prisoner.

"My grandmother couldn't make up her mind about this, and advised him to sleep on it. The young man (she said) had faithfully kept his bed all day, but was growing resty. So my grandfather, before supping, took a light and went upstairs to the garret.

"'We've kept the scent wide to-day,' he reported, very cheerful-like. 'But you'll have to lie still for a while yet.'

"'Lyin' here puts a strain on a man,' the lad grumbled. 'Couldn't I take a turn in the fields, now that dark has fallen? I'd promise not to stray far from the house.'

"'That's a notion,' my grandfather agreed. 'I once had to lie in bed two days with a quinsy, and I hated it.' He considered for a while, and could see no objection. 'Come down and sup with us,' he said; 'and afterwards, if the missus agrees, you can take a stroll. But don't make too much noise when you let yourself in again.'

"Well, so it was fixed; and after supper the lad

put on a pair of high-lows my grandfather lent him, and started off for a ramble in the night air, with a plenty of instructions about the safest paths. At nine o'clock, which was their regular hour, my grandfather and grandmother made out the light and went to bed, leaving the door on the latch. It was an hour before my grandfather could get to sleep. He was thinking of the five guineas, and how they ought rightfully to be divided.

"At five in the morning his wife woke him, and declared that in her belief the lad was still abroad. If he had returned and gone to his garret she must have heard; but she had heard nothing. She harped on this till my grandfather climbed out and went to the garret for a look; and sure enough the bed was empty.

"They lay awake till daylight, the pair of them, cogitating this and that. But when the dawn came, my grandfather could stand it no longer. He pulled on his breeches and boots, went downstairs, and had scarcely thrown open the door before he heard screams and saw a wretched figure, naked to the shirt, running across the yard towards the house. It was Nathan the Jew, and he tumbled in front of my grandfather, and caught hold of him by the boots while he yelled for mercy.

"What, do you suppose, was the explanation? My

grandfather could scarcely make head or tail of it, even after listening to the Jew's story. And neither he nor my grandmother ever set eyes on the prisoner lad again. But about nine months later there came a letter from America that helped to clear things up.

"The poor boy—so he wrote in his letter—being turned loose under the sky after fifteen months of captivity, just couldn't go back to the garret. Though the night was pitch black and full of mist, and the stars hidden, he wanted no more than to pace to and fro, and look up and open his chest to it. To and fro he went, a bit further each time, but always keeping my grandfather's directions somewhere at the back of his mind, and always searching back till he could see the glimmer of whitewash showing him where the house stood. In the letter he sent to my grandmother he told very freely of the thoughts that came to him there while he felt his way back and forth; and to a staid woman that had never been shut up behind bars the writing—or the most of it—was mad enough. 'Liberty! Liberty!' it kept saying: and 'good though it was, how much better if he'd been able to see just one star through the fog!'

"By little and little he stretched his tether so far, forgetting how the time went, that the dawn overtook him a good half-mile from the house; and through the grey of it he caught sight of a man standing about fifty yards away, and right in his

path. He turned to run, and then his heart almost jumped out of his mouth as he saw another man standing to catch him with arms held wide!

"But what had happened was, he had strayed into the pea-patch and the figure with its arms stretched out was no man at all, but a scarecrow. The lad had no sooner made sure of this than he whipped behind it, stretched out his hands upon the cross-trees that served it for arms, and clung there, praying.

"Now the man creeping down the field was Nathan the Jew. He had been wandering the moor all night, crazy with terror; and when the dawn showed him a house, he could have turned Christian and dropped on his knees. But casting a glance over his shoulder as he ran towards it, he caught sight of the scarecrow. For a second or two he ran faster, believing it to be either a man or a ghost. He took another glance back and came to a halt.

"He knew it now for a scarecrow. He stood, and he stood, and he eyed it.

"The scarecrow had a suit of clothes that was all tatters, and an old beaver hat. It was the hat that took Nathan's fancy. Beaver hats cost a deal of money in those days: but they had a knack of lasting, and Nathan had scarcely ever met with one, however old, that he couldn't sell for a few pence. For a minute or so he stood there, letting his sense

of business get the better of his fright; then he swallowed down the last doubt sticking in his throat, walked straight up to the scarecrow, and made a grab at the hat.

"'Leave my head alone, can't you?' said the scarecrow. And with that Mr. Nathan dropped in a fit; yet not so quick but that before dropping he caught a straight blow full on the jaw.

"When he came to, his coat was gone, and his bag, and his hats, including the scarecrow's. But the rest of the scarecrow stood over him, with its arms stretched out just as before; and he picked himself up, and ran from it.

"As for the lad, by this time he had made the best of two miles towards Plymouth. In his letter he apologised very prettily to my grandmother for not saying good-bye. He owed his life to her, he said; but being taken unawares he had done the best he could in the circumstances."

MY CHRISTMAS BURGLARY

[*From the Memoirs of a Pierrot.*]

I HAD come with high expectations, for Mr. Felix, a bachelor of sixty-five, was reputed to have made for thirty years this particular cabinet his idol. Any nabob or millionaire can collect. Mr. Felix, being moderately well to do, had selected. He would have none but the best; and the best lay stored delicately on cotton-wool, ticketed with the tiniest handwriting, in a nest of drawers I could have unlocked with a hairpin.

The topmost drawer contained scarabs (of which I am no connoisseur); the second some two dozen intaglios, and of these, by the light of my bull's-eye lantern, I examined five or six before sweeping the lot into my bag—Europe and the Bull, Ganymede in the eagle's claw, Agave carrying the head of Pentheus, Icarus with relaxed wing dropping headlong to a sea represented by one wavy line; each and all priceless. In the third drawer lay an unset emerald, worth a king's ransom, a clasp of two amethysts, and a necklace of black pearls graduated to a hair's breadth.

By this time I could see—I read it even in the exquisite parsimony of the collection—that I had to deal with an artist, and sighed that in this world artists should prey upon one another. The fourth drawer was reserved for miniatures, the most of them circleted with diamonds: the fifth for snuff-boxes—gold snuff-boxes bearing royal cyphers, snuff-boxes of tortoise-shell and gold, snuff-boxes of blue enamel set with diamonds. A couple of these chinked together as they dropped into the bag. The sound startled me, and I paused for a moment to look over my shoulder.

The window stood open as I had left it. Outside, in the windless frosty night, the snow on the house-roofs sparkled under a wintering moon now near the close of her first quarter. But though the night was windless, a current of air poured into the room, and had set a little flame dancing in the fireplace where, three minutes ago, the sea-coals had held but a feeble glow, half-sullen. Downstairs, in some distant apartment, fiddles were busy with a waltz tune, and a violoncello kept the beat with a low thudding pizzicato. For Mr. Felix was giving a Christmas party.

I turned from this hasty glance to pick up another snuff-box. As my fingers closed on it the music suddenly grew louder, and I looked up as the door opened, and a man stood on the threshold—a short, square-set man, dressed in black.

"Eh?" He gave a little start of surprise. "No, no, excuse me, my friend, but you are seeking in the wrong cabinet."

Before I could pull myself together, he had stepped to the window and closed it. "You had best keep quite still," he said, "and then we can talk. There are servants on the stairs below, and should you attempt the way you came, there are three constables just around the corner. I hired them to regulate the carriage traffic: but now that the last guest has arrived, they will be cooling their heels for a spell; and I have a whistle. I have also a pistol." With a turn of his hand he flung open a door in a dark armoire beside the window, dived a hand into its recesses, and produced the weapon. "And it is loaded," he added, still in the same business-like voice, in which, after his first brief exclamation, my ear detected no tremor.

"By all means let us talk," I said.

He was crossing to the fireplace, but wheeled about sharply at the sound of my voice. "Eh? An educated man, apparently!" Laying the pistol on the mantel-shelf, he plucked a twisted spill of paper from a vase hard by, stooped, ignited it from the flame dancing in the sea-coals, and proceeded to light the candles in an old-fashioned girandole that overhung the fireplace. There were five candles, and he lit them all.

They revealed him a clean-shaven, white-haired man, meticulously dressed in black—black swallow-tail coat, open waistcoat, and frilled shirt-front, on which his laundress must have spent hours of labour; closely fitting black knee-breeches, black silk stockings, black polished shoes. They silhouetted, too, in the moment before he swung round on me, an enormous nose, like a punchinello's, and the outline of a shapely head, sufficiently massive to counterbalance and save it from caricature. The size of the head again would have suggested deformity, but for the broad shoulders that carried it. As he faced me squarely with his back to the hearth, his chest and shoulders narrowing to the hips of a runner, and still narrowing (though he stood astraddle) to ankles and feet that would not have disgraced a lady, he put me in mind of a matador I had seen years before, facing his bull in the ring at Seville. The firelight behind them emphasized the neat outline of his legs. He carried a black cloak on his left arm, and in his left hand an opera-hat, pressed flat against his left side. In closing the window, in finding and producing the pistol, and again in lighting the candles, he had used his right hand only.

"A gentleman?" he asked, contracting his brows and eyeing me.

"Well," said I, with an uncomfortable, nervous laugh, that itself accused my breeding, so inferior it

was to the situation, "possibly you are one of those who mix up the name with moral conduct——"

"To some extent," he answered, without seeming to interrupt. "Every one does, I fancy."

"At any rate I won't challenge it," said I. "But you may, if you will, call me a man of some education. I was at Magdalen once, but left Oxford without taking my degree."

"Ah!" He inclined his head a little to one side. "Cards?"

"Certainly not," I answered with heat. "I own that appearances are against me, but I was never that kind of man. As a matter of fact, it happened over a horse."

He nodded. "So you, too, though you won't challenge the name, have to mix up moral conduct with your disposition. We draw the line variously, but every one draws it somewhere. . . . Magdalen, hey? If I mistake not, the foundationers of Magdalen —including, perhaps, some who were undergraduates with you—are assembled in the college hall at this moment to celebrate Christmas, and hear the choir sing Pergolesi's Gloria."

"The reminder hurts me," said I—"if that be any gratification to you."

"A sentimentalist?" Mr. Felix's eyes twinkled. "Better and better! I have the very job for you—but we will discuss that by-and-by. Only let me say

that you must have dropped on me, just now, from heaven—you really must. But please don't make a practice of it! I have invested too much in my curios; and others have invested more.... That snuff-box, for instance, which you were handling a moment ago . . . at one time in its history it cost—ay, and fetched—close on two hundred millions of money."

I began to have hopes that I was dealing with a madman.

"Or rather," he corrected himself, "the money was paid for a pinch of the snuff it contains. Open it carefully, if you please! and you will behold the genuine rappee, the very particles over which France fought with Austria. What says Vergil? '*Hi motus animorum atque haec certamina tanta Pulveris exigui jactu*'—yes, but in this instance, you see, the pinch of dust was the exciting cause. Sir, the Austrian ambassador, one fatal afternoon, refused to take from the box in your hand that which, three weeks later, and all too late, he would gladly have purchased with many millions. Observe the imperial crown on the lid, with the bees around it, as if to illustrate Vergil's warning. I bought the thing myself, sir, for six napoleons, off a dealer in the Rue du Fouarre: but the price will rise again. Yes, certainly, I count on its fetching three hundred pounds at least when I have departed this life, and three hundred pounds will go some little way towards my monument."

"Your monument?" I echoed.

He nodded again. "In good time, my friend, you shall hear about it; for you make, I perceive, a good listener. You have gifts, though you do less than justice to them. Suffice it to say that I am a sentimentalist, like yourself. I never married nor begat children; and I have but a shaky belief in the future state; but my sentimentality hankers after —you may even say it postulates—some kind of continuity. I cannot discuss this here and now, for by the sound of the violins, the dance is coming to an end, and my guests will be growing impatient. But you remember Samson's riddle? Well, out of my corpse (I trust) shall come forth honey: whereas out of yours, unless you employ your talents better——" He broke off, and stepped close up to me. "Ah, but excuse me," he said, and, reaching out a hand, caught me suddenly by the collar.

The arrest—I made sure it was an arrest—took me unprepared, and threw me off my balance. I broke away a pace, drawing back my fist to strike: and in that moment I felt his hand relax with a curious fluttering movement as though his fingers drummed on the back of my neck. I heard him laugh too: and before I could hit out he sprang back, holding in his hand a white rabbit!

"An old trick—eh?—and a simple one." He pressed out the spring of his opera hat, dropped the

rabbit inside, dived his hand after it, and drew out two white rabbits by the ears. "But it will amuse my young friends downstairs, and I practise this kind of thing at odd whiles."

He set the rabbits on the floor, where they gave themselves a shake, and hopped off towards the shelter of the window-curtains.

"Now you are the very man I wanted," said he, "and I am going to make you sing for your supper." He stepped to the armoire, and drew out a long cloak of scarlet, furred with ermine. "I had meant to wear this myself," he went on; but stopped all of a sudden at sight of my face, and began to laugh quietly, in a way that made me long to take him by the throat. "Dear me, dear me! I understand! Association of ideas—Court of Assize, eh? But this is no judical robe, my friend: it belongs to Father Christmas. Here's his wig now—quite another sort of wig, you perceive—with a holly wreath around it. And here's his beard, beautifully frosted with silver." He held wig and beard towards the window, and let the moonlight play over them. "On with them, quick! . . . And the boots." Again he dived into the armoire, and produced a pair of Blüchers, the long ankle leathers gummed over with cotton-wool, to represent snow. "It's lucky they reach a good way up the leg, seeing the cloak is a trifle short for a man of your inches." He stepped

back a pace and surveyed me as I fitted on the beard.

"There are punishments and punishments," said I. "And I hope, whatever your game may be, you will remember that there's punishment in dressing up like a tom-fool."

"Ah, but you'll catch the spirit of it!" he assured me: and then, rubbing his hands, he appeared to muse for a moment. "I ought," said he, with a glance towards the fireplace, "I really ought to send Father Christmas down by way of the chimney. The flue opens just above here, and I believe it would accommodate you; but I am not very sure if my housekeeper had it swept last spring. No," he decided, "the music has ceased, and we must lose no time. I will spare you the chimney."

He called to his rabbits, picked them up as they came hopping from behind the curtains, popped them into his hat, shut it with a snap, and lo! they had vanished.

"You'll excuse me," I ventured, as he stepped to the door; "but—but the—the few articles here in the bag——"

"Oh, bring them along with you: bring them along by all means! We may have a present or two to make, down below."

From the head of the staircase we looked down into a hall gaily lit with paper lanterns. Holly and

ivy wreathed the broad balustrade, and the old pictures around the walls. A bunch of mistletoe hung from a great chandelier that sparkled with hundreds of glass prisms, and under it a couple of footmen in gilt liveries and powder crossed at that moment with trays of jellies and syllabubs.

They were well-trained footmen, too; for at sight of me descending the stairs in my idiotic outfit they betrayed no surprise at all. One of them set his tray down on a table, stepped neatly ahead as Mr. Felix reached the lowest stair, and opened a door for us on the right. I found myself at a stand on the threshold, blinking at a blaze of light, and staring up a perspective of waxed floor at a miniature stage which filled the far end of the room. Light, as every one knows, travels farther than sound: were it not so, I should say that almost ahead of the blaze there broke on us a din of voices—of happy children's voices. Certainly it stunned my ears before I had time to blink.

The room was lined with children—scores of children: and some of them, were gathered in little groups, and some of them, panting and laughing from their dance, had dropped into the chairs ranged along the walls. But these were the minority. The most of the guests lay in cots, or sat with crutches beside them, or with hands dropped in their laps. These last were the blind ones. I do not set up to be a lover of children: but the discovery that the most

of these small guests were crippled hit me with a kind of pitiful awe; and right on top of it came a second and worse shock, to note how many of them were blind.

To me these blind eyes were the only merciful ones, as Mr. Felix beckoned Father Christmas to follow him up to the stage between the two lines of curious gazers. "O—oh!" had been their first cry as they caught sight of me in the doorway: and "O—oh!" I heard them murmuring, child after child, in long-drawn fugue, as we made our way up the long length of the room that winked detection from every candle, every reflector, every foot of its polished floor.

We gained the stage together by a short stairway draped with flags. Mr. Felix with a wave of his opera-hat, called on the orchestra to strike up "A Fine Old English Gentleman" (meaning me or, if you like it, Father Christmas: and I leave you to picture the fool I looked). Then, stepping to the footlights, he introduced me, explaining that he had met me wandering upstairs, rifling his most secret drawers to fill my bag with seasonable presents for them. Five or six times he interrupted his patter to pluck a cracker or a bon-bon out of my beard, and toss it down to his audience. The children gasped at first, and stared at the magic spoil on the floor. By-and-by one adventurous little girl crept forward, and picked up a cracker, and her cry of

delight as she discovered that it was real, gave the signal for a general scramble. Mr. Felix continued his patter without seeming to heed it: but his hand went up faster and faster to my beard and wig, and soon the crackers were falling in showers. I saw children snatch them off the floor and carry them to their blind brothers and sisters, pressing them between the wondering, groping hands with assurance that they were real. . . . Mr. Felix saw it too, and his flow of words ceased with a gulp, as though a flowing spring gurgled suddenly and withdrew itself underground. "I am a sentimentalist," he said to me quickly, in a pause which nobody heeded; for by this time crackers were banging to right and left, and the children shouting together. Their shouts rose to one yell of laughter as, recovering himself, he dived at my neck, and produced the two struggling rabbits. His opera-hat opened with a snap, and in they went. A second later it shut flat again, and they were gone, into thin air. He opened the hat with a puzzled frown, plunged a hand, and dragged forth yard upon yard of ribbon—red, green, white, blue, yellow ribbon, mixed up with packs of playing cards that, with a turn of the hand he sent spinning into air, to fall thick as leaves in Vallombrosa.

"Your turn!" he panted as, at the end of the ribbon he lugged out an enormous cabbage, and trundled it down the room. Catching my bag from

me, he shook his cloak over it once, and returned it to my hands, bulging, stuffed full to the brim with toys —dolls, tops, whips, trumpets, boxes of animals, boxes of tin soldiers. . . .

"Father Christmas, now! Make way for Father Christmas!"

The infection took me, and stumbling down from the stage by the stairway, I fell to distributing the largesse left and right. The first bagful carried me less than a third of the way down the room: for I gave with both hands, and, when a blind child fumbled long with a toy, dropped it at his feet, and tried another, and yet another till his smile suited me. The dropped toys lay where they had fallen. The spirit of the game had made me reckless; and I halted with a cold shiver as my fingers touched the gems at the bottom of the bag, and, looking down the room, I was aware that my store was exhausted, and as yet two-thirds of the children had received no gift. I turned —all in a cold shiver—to retrace my steps and pick up the toys at the blind children's feet, and as I did so, felt myself a bungler past pardon. But in the act of turning, I cast a look back at the stage: and there stood Mr. Felix, nodding approval and beckoning. So, as in a dream, I went back. "Capital!" was his only comment. Taking my bag, he passed his cloak over it again, and again handed it to me, stuffed to the brim.

Thrice I returned to him; but the third refill was a scanty one, since by this time there lacked but half a score of the taller children to be satisfied. To these, too, I distributed their gifts, and when every eager pair of hands had been laden, I wheeled about for the next word of command.

But Mr. Felix had skipped down from the stage, letting the curtain fall behind him. He stood with his back to me, waving both arms to the orchestra; and as the musicians plunged at the opening bars of the Toy Symphony, the curtain rose, almost as soon as it had dropped; and rose upon a scene representing a street with shops decked for Christmas, and snow upon their eaves and window ledges.

Then, still to the strains of the Toy Symphony, a Harlequin ran in, with a Columbine, whom he twisted upon his bent knee, and tossed lightly through the upper window of a baker's shop, himself diving a moment later, with a slap of his wand, through the flap of the fishmonger's door, hard by. Next, as on a frozen slide, came the Clown, with red-hot poker, the Pantaloon tripping over his stick, and two Constables wreathed in strings of sausages. The Clown boxed the Pantaloon's ears; the Pantaloon passed on the buffet to the Constables, and all plunged together into the fishmonger's. The Clown emerged running with a stolen plaice, passed it into the hands of the Pantaloon, who followed, and was in turn pursued off the scene by

the Constables: but the fishmonger, issuing last in chase, ran into the Clown, who caught up a barrel of red herrings and bonnetted him. The fishmonger extricated himself, and the two began to pelt each other with herrings, while the children screamed with laughter. . . .

It was a famous harlequinade; and, as usual, it concluded the entertainment. For after a harlequinade, what can stand between a child and happy dreams?—especially if he go to them with his arms full of Christmas presents. Five minutes after the curtain had fallen I found myself standing beside Mr. Felix in the hall, while he bade good night to his guests. Carriages of his hiring had arrived for them, and the coachmen apparently had received their orders. A dozen well-trained nurses moved about the hall, and, having dressed the little ones—who by this time were almost too drowsy with pleasure to thank their entertainer,—carried them out into the portico, where the liveried footmen stood by the carriage doors. Slam! went the doors, and one after another—with scarcely a word of command—the carriages bowled off over the thick snow.

When the last guest had gone, Mr. Felix turned to me.

"The play is over," said he. "When I am gone,

it will be repeated year after year at Christmas, at the Cripples' Hospital. My will provides for that, and that will be my monument. But for a few years to come I hope to hold the entertainment here, in my own house. Come, you may take off your robe and wig and go in peace. I would fain have a talk with you, but I am tired, as perhaps you may guess. Go, then—and go in peace!"

Motioning the footman to fall back, he walked out with me and down the steps of the portico; but halted on the lowest step by the edge of the frozen snow, and with a wave of the hand dismissed me into the night.

I had gained the end of the street and the bridge that there spans the river before it occurred to me that I was carrying my bag, and—with a shock—that my bag still held the stolen jewels.

By the second lamp on the bridge I halted, lifted the bag on to the snow-covered parapet, thrust in a hand, and drew forth—a herring!

Herrings—red herrings—filled the bag to the brim. I dragged them forth, and rained handful after handful overboard into the black water. Still, below them, I had hopes to find the jewels. But the jewels were gone. At least, I supposed that all were gone, when—having jettisoned the last herring—I groped around the bottom of the bag.

Something pricked my finger. I drew it out and

held it under the lamp-light. It was a small turquoise brooch, set around with diamonds.

For at least two minutes I stared at it, there, under the lamp; had slipped it halfway into my waistcoat pocket; but suddenly took a new resolve, and walked back along the street to the house.

Mr. Felix yet stood on the lower step of the portico. Above him, still as a statue, a footman waited at the great house-door, until it should please his master to re-enter.

"Excuse me, sir——" I began, and held up the brooch.

"I meant it for you," said Mr. Felix, quietly, affably. "I gave precisely five pounds for it, at an auction, and I warn you that it is worth just thrice that sum. Still, if you would prefer ready money, as in your circumstances I dare say you do"—he felt in his breeches pocket—"here are the five sovereigns, and—once more—go in peace."

THE MAYOR'S DOVECOT

A CAUTIONARY TALE

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century there lived at Dolphin House, Troy, a Mr. Samuel Pinsent, ship-chandler, who by general consent was the funniest fellow that ever took up his abode in the town. He came originally from somewhere in the South Hams, but this tells us nothing, for the folk of the South Hams are a decent, quiet lot, and you might travel the district to-day from end to end without coming across the like of Mr. Pinsent.

He was, in fact, an original. He could do nothing like an ordinary man, and he did everything jocosely, with a wink and a chuckle. To watch him, you might suppose that business was a first-class practical joke, and he invariably wound up a hard bargain by slapping his victim on the back. Some called him Funny Pinsent, others The Bester. Few liked him. Nevertheless he prospered, and in 1827 was chosen mayor of the borough.

In person, Mr. Pinsent was spare and diminutive, with a bald head, a tuft of badger-grey hair over

either ear, and a fresh-coloured, clean-shaven face, extraordinarily wrinkled about the face and at the corners of the eyes, which twinkled at you from under a pair of restless stivvery eyebrows. You had only to look at them and note the twitch of his lips to be warned of the man's facetiousness.

Mr. Pinsent's office—for he had no shop-front, and indeed his stock-in-trade was not of a quality to invite inspection—looked out upon the Town Square; his back premises upon the harbour, across a patch of garden, terminated by a low wall and a blue-painted quay-door. I call it a garden because Mr. Pinsent called it so; and, to be sure, it boasted a stretch of turf, a couple of flower-beds, a flagstaff, and a small lean-to greenhouse. But casks and coils of manilla rope, blocks, pumps, and chain-cables, encroached upon the amenities of the spot—its pebbled pathway, its parterres, its raised platform overgrown with nasturtiums, where Mr. Pinsent sat and smoked of an evening and watched the shipping; the greenhouse stored sacks of ship-bread as well as pot-plants; and Mrs. Salt, his housekeeper (he was unmarried) had attached a line to the flagstaff, and aired the washing thereon.

But the pride of the garden was its dovecote, formed of a large cider-barrel on a mast. The barrel was pierced with pigeon-holes, and fitted with ledges on which the birds stood to preen themselves.

Mr. Pinsent did not profess himself a fancier. His columbarium—a mixed collection of fantails and rocketers—had come to him by a side-wind of business, as offset against a bad debt; but it pleased him to sit on his terrace and watch the pretty creatures as they wheeled in flight over the harbour and among the masts of the shipping. They cost him nothing to keep, for he had always plenty of condemned peas on hand; and they multiplied in peace at the top of their mast, which was too smooth for any cat to climb.

One summer's night, however, about midway in the term of his mayoralty, Mr. Pinsent was awakened from slumber by a strange sound of fluttering. It came through the open window from the garden, and almost as he sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes it warned him that something serious was amiss with his dovecote. He flung off the bedclothes and made a leap for the window.

The night was warm and windless, with a waning moon in the east, and as yet no tremble of the dawn below it. Around the foot of the dovecote the turf lay in blackest shadow; but a moon-ray overtopping the low ridge of Mr. Garraway's back premises (Mr. Pinsent's next-door neighbour on the left), illuminated the eastern side of the barrel, the projecting platform on which it rested, and a yard or more of the mast, from its summit down—or, to be

accurate, it shed a pale radiance on a youthful figure, clinging there by its legs, and upon a hand and arm reaching over the platform to rob the roost.

"You infernal young thief!" shouted Mr. Pinsent.

As his voice broke upon the night across the silent garden, the hand paused suddenly in the act of dragging forth a pigeon which it had gripped by the neck. The bird, almost as suddenly set free, flapped across the platform, found its wings and scuffled away in flight. The thief—Mr. Pinsent had been unable to detect his features—slid down the mast into darkness, and the darkness, a moment later, became populous with whispering voices and the sound of feet stealing away towards the yet deeper shadow of Mr. Garraway's wall.

"Who goes there?" challenged Mr. Pinsent again. "Villains! Robbers! You just wait till I come down to you! I've a gun here, by George! and if you don't stand still there and give me your names——"

But this was an empty threat. Mr. Pinsent, though nothing of a sportsman, did indeed possess a gun, deposited with him years ago as security against a small loan. But it hung over the office chimney-piece downstairs, and he could not have loaded it, even if given the necessary powder and shot. Possibly the boys guessed this. At any rate, they made no answer.

Possibly, too (for a white nightcap and nightshirt

were discernible in almost pitchy darkness), they saw him strut back from the window to slip downstairs and surprise them. Mr. Pinsent paused only to insert his feet into a pair of loose slippers, and again, as he unbolted the back door, to snatch a lantern off its hook. Yet by the time he ran out upon the garden the depredators had made good their escape.

He groped inside the lantern for the tinder-box, which lay within, handy for emergencies; found it, and kneeling on the grass-plot beside the mast, struck flint upon steel. As he blew upon the tinder and the faint glow lit up his face and nightcap, a timorous exclamation quavered down from one of the upper windows.

"Oh, sir! Wha—whatever is the matter?" It was the voice of Mrs. Salt, the housekeeper.

For a moment Mr. Pinsent did not answer. In the act of thrusting the brimstone match into the lantern his eye had fallen on a white object lying on the turf and scarcely a yard away—a white fantail pigeon, dead, with a twisted neck. He picked up the bird and stared around angrily into the darkness.

"Robbery is the matter, ma'am," he announced, speaking up to the unseen figure in the window. "Some young ruffians have been stealing and killing my pigeons. I caught 'em in the act, and a serious

matter they'll find it." Here Mr. Pinsent raised his voice, in case any of the criminals should be lurking within earshot. "I doubt, ma'am, a case like this will have to go to the assizes."

"Hadn't you better put something on?" suggested another voice, not Mrs. Salt's, from somewhere on the left.

"Eh?" Mr. Pinsent wheeled about and peered into the darkness. "Is that you, Garraway?"

"It is," answered Mr. Garraway from his bedroom window over the wall. "Been stealin' your pigeons, have they? Well, I'm sorry; and yet in a way 'tis a relief to my mind. For, first along, seeing you, out there, skipping round in your shirt with a lantern, I'd a fear you had been taken funny in the night!"

"Bless the man!" said Mr. Pinsent. "Do you suppose I'd do this for a joke?"

"I don't know," responded Mr. Garraway, with guarded candour. "I feared it. But, of course, if they've stolen your pigeons, 'tis another matter. A very serious matter, as you say, and no doubt your being mayor makes it all the worse."

Now this attitude of Mr. Garraway conveyed a hint of warning, had Mr. Pinsent been able to seize it. The inhabitants of Troy have, in fact, a sense of humour, but it does not include facetiousness. On the contrary, facetiousness affronts and pains them.

They do not understand it, and Mr. Pinsent understood nothing else. Could he have been told that for close upon twenty years he had been afflicting his neighbours with the pleasantries he found so enjoyable, his answer had undoubtedly been "The bigger numskulls they!" But now his doom was upon him.

He ate his breakfast that morning in silence. Mrs. Salt, burning to discuss the robbery, set down the dishes with a quite unnecessary clatter, but in vain. He scarcely raised his head.

"Indeed, sir, and I've never known you so upset," she broke out at length, unable to contain herself longer. "Which I've always said that you was wonderful, the way you saw the bright side of everything and could pass it off with a laugh."

"Good Lord!" said Mr. Pinsent, testily. "Did I ever call midnight robbery a laughing matter?"

"No—o," answered Mrs. Salt, yet as one not altogether sure. "And I dare say your bein' mayor makes you take a serious view."

Breakfast over, the mayor took hat and walking-stick for his customary morning stroll along the street to Butcher Trengrove's to choose the joint for his dinner and pick up the town's earliest gossip. It is Troy's briskest hour; when the dairy carts, rattling homeward, meet the country folk from up-the-river who have just landed at the quays and

begun to sell from door to door their poultry and fresh eggs, vegetables, fruit, and nosegays of garden flowers; when the tradesmen, having taken down their shutters, stand in the roadway, admire the effect of their shop-windows and admonish the apprentices cleaning the panes; when the children loiter and play at hop-scotch on their way to school, and the housewives, having packed them off, find time for neighbourly clack over the scouring of doorsteps.

It might be the mayor's fancy and no more, but it certainly appeared to him that the children smiled with a touch of mockery as they met him and saluted. For aught he knew any one of these grinning imps—confound em'!—might be implicated in the plot. The townsmen gave him "good morning" as usual, and yet not quite as usual. He felt that news of the raid had won abroad; that, although shy of speaking, they were studying his face for a sign. He kept it carefully cheerful; but came near to losing his temper when he reached Trengrove's shop to find Mr. Garraway already there and in earnest conversation with the butcher.

"Ah! good mornin' again! I was just talkin' about you and your pigeons," said Mr. Garraway, frankly.

"Good morning, y'r Worship," echoed Butcher Trengrove. "And what can I do for y'r Worship this fine morning? I was just allowin' to Mr. Garraway

here that, seein' the young dare-devils had left you a bird with their compliments, maybe you'd fancy a nice cut of rumpsteak to fill out a pie."

"This isn't exactly a laughing matter, Mr. Trengrove."

"No, no, to be sure!" Butcher Trengrove composed his broad smile apologetically. But, after a moment, observing Mr. Pinsent's face and that (at what cost he guessed not) it kept its humorous twist, he let his features relax. "I was allowin' though, that if any man could get even with a bit of fun, it would be y'r Worship."

"Oh, never fear but I'll get even with 'em," promised his Worship, affecting an easiness he did not feel.

"Monstrous, though! monstrous!" pursued the butcher. "The boys of this town be gettin' past all control. Proper young limbs, I call some of 'em."

"And there's the fellow that's to blame," put in Mr. Garraway, with a nod at a little man hurrying past the shop, on the opposite pavement. This was Mr. Lupus, the schoolmaster, on his way to open school. "Hi! Mr. Lupus!"

Mr. Lupus gave a start, came to a halt, and turned on the shop door a pair of mildly curious eyes guarded by moon-shaped spectacles. Mr. Lupus lived with an elderly sister who kept a bakehouse beside the Ferry Landing, and there in extra-scholastic hours

he earned a little money by writing letters for seamen. His love-letters had quite a reputation, and he penned them in a beautiful hand, with flourishes around the capital letters; but in Troy he passed for a person of small account.

"I—I beg your pardon, gentlemen! Were you calling to me?" stammered Mr. Lupus.

"Good morning, Lupus!" The mayor nodded to him. "We were just saying that you bring up the boys of this town shamefully. Yes, sir, shamefully."

"No, indeed, your Worship," protested Mr. Lupus, looking up with a timid smile, as he drew off his spectacles and polished them. "Your Worship is pleasant with me. I do assure you, gentlemen, that my boys are very good boys, and give me scarcely any trouble."

"That's because you sit at school in your day-dreams, and don't take note of the mischief that goes on around you. A set of anointed young scoundrels, Mr. Lupus!"

"You don't mean it, sir. Oh, to be sure you don't mean it! Your Worship's funny way of putting things is well known, if I may say so. But they are good boys, on the whole, very good boys; and you should see the regularity with which they attend. I sometimes wish—meaning no offence—that you gentlemen of position in the town would drop in upon us a little oftener. It would give you a better

idea of us, indeed it would. For my boys are very good boys, and for regularity of attendance we will challenge any school in Cornwall, sir, if you will forgive my boasting."

Now this suggestion of Mr. Lupus, though delicately put, and in a nervous flutter, ought by rights to have hit the mayor and Mr. Garraway hard; the pair of them being trustees of the charity under which the Free Grammar School was administered. But in those days few public men gave a thought to education, and Mr. Lupus taught school, year in and year out, obedient to his own conscience, his own enthusiasms; unencouraged by visitation or word of advice from his governors.

The mayor, to be sure, flushed red for a moment; but Mr. Garraway's withers were unwrung.

"That don't excuse their committing burglary and stealing his Worship's pigeons," said he. Briefly he told what had happened.

Mr. Lupus adjusted and readjusted his spectacles, still in a nervous flurry.

"You surprise me, gentlemen. It is unlike my boys—unlike all that I have ever believed of them. You will excuse me, but if this be true, I shall take it much to heart. So regular in attendance, and—stealing pigeons, you say? Oh, be sure, sirs, I will give them a talking-to—a severe talking-to—this very morning."

The little schoolmaster went his way down the street in a flutter. Mr. Pinsent stared after him abstractedly.

"That man," said he, after a long pause, "ought to employ some one to use his cane for him."

With this, for no apparent reason, his eye brightened suddenly. But the source of his inspiration he kept to himself. His manner was jocular as ever as he ordered his steak.

On his way home he knocked at the door of the town sergeant, Thomas Trebilcock, a septuagenarian, more commonly known as Pretty Tommy. The town sergeant was out in the country, picking mushrooms; but his youngest granddaughter, who opened the door, promised to send him along to the mayor's office as soon as ever he returned.

At ten o'clock, or a little later, Pretty Tommy presented himself, and found Mr. Pinsent at his desk engaged in complacent study of a sheet of manuscript, to which he had just attached his signature.

"I think this will do," said Mr. Pinsent, with a twinkle, and he recited the composition aloud.

Pretty Tommy, having adjusted his horn spectacles, took the paper and read it through laboriously.

"You want me to cry it through the town?"

"Certainly. You can fetch your bell, and go along with it at once."

"Your Worship knows best, o' course." Pretty Tommy appeared to hesitate.

"Why, what's wrong with it?"

"Nothin'," said Tommy, after a slow pause and another perusal, "only 'tis unusual—unusual, and funny at the same time; an' that's always a risk." He paused again for a moment, and his face brightened. "But, there!" he said, "'tis a risk you're accustomed to by this time."

Half an hour later the sound of the town sergeant's bell at the end of the street called tradesmen from their benches and housewives from their kitchens to hear the following proclamation, to which Tommy had done honour by donning his official robe (of blue, gold-laced) with a scarlet pelisse and a cocked hat. A majestic figure he made, too, standing in the middle of the roadway with spectacles on nose, and the great handbell tucked under his arm—

"O YES! O YES! O YES!

"Take you all notice: that whereas some evil-disposed boys did last night break into the premises of Samuel Pinsent, Worshipful Mayor of this Borough, and did rob His Worship of several valuable pigeons; His Worship hereby offers a reward of Five Shillings to the parent or parents of any such boy as will hand him over, that the Mayor may have ten minutes with him in private. Amen.

"GOD SAVE THE KING!"

Mr. Pinsent, seated in his office, heard the bell sounding far up the street, and chuckled to himself. He chuckled again, peering through his wire blinds, when Pretty Tommy emerged upon the square outside and took his stand in the middle of it to read the proclamation. It collected no crowd, but it drew many faces to the windows and doorways, and Mr. Pinsent observed that one and all broke into grins as they took the humour of his offer.

He rubbed his hands together. He had been angry to begin with; yes—he would confess it—very angry. But he had overcome it and risen to his reputation. The town had been mistaken in thinking it could put fun on him. It was tit-for-tat again, and the laugh still with Samuel Pinsent.

He ate his dinner that day in high good humour, drank a couple of glasses of port, and retired (as his custom was on warm afternoons) to his back-parlour, for an hour's siesta. Through the open window he heard the residue of his pigeons murmuring in their cots, and the sound wooed him to slumber. So for half an hour he slept, with an easy conscience, a sound digestion, and a yellow bandanna handkerchief over his head to protect him from the flies. A tapping at the door awakened him.

"There's a woman here—Long Halloran's wife, of Back Street—wishes to see you, sir," announced the voice of Mrs. Salt.

"Woman!" said the mayor, testily. "Haven't you learned by this time that I'm not to be disturbed after dinner?"

"She said her business was important, sir. It's—it's about the pigeons," explained Mrs. Salt.

And before he could protest again, Mrs. Halloran had thrust her way into the room and stood curtseying, with tears of recent weeping upon her homely and extremely dirty face. Behind her shuffled a lanky, sheepish-eyed boy, and took up his stand at her shoulder with a look half-sullen, half-defiant.

"It's about my Mike, sir," began Mrs. Halloran, in a lachrymose voice, and paused to dab her eyes with a corner of her apron. "Which I'm sure, sir, we ought to be very grateful to you for all your kindness and the trouble you're takin', and so says the boy's father. For he's growin' up more of a handful every day, and how to manage him passes our wits."

"Are you telling me, Mrs. Halloran, that this boy of yours is the thief who stole my pigeons?"

Mr. Pinsent, looking at the boy with a magisterial frown, began to wish he had not been quite so hasty in sending round the town sergeant.

"You did, didn't you, Mike?" appealed Mrs. Halloran. And Mike, looking straight before him, grunted something which might pass for an admission. "You must try to overlook the boy's manner, sir. He's case-hardened, I fear, and it goes sore to

a mother's heart that ever I should rear up a child to be a thief. But as Halloran said to me, 'Take the young limb to his Worship,' Halloran says, 'and maybe a trifle of correction by a gentleman in his Worship's position will have some effect,' he says. But I hope, sir, you won't visit all the punishment on Mike, for he didn't do it alone; and though I'm not sayin' he don't deserve all he gets, 'tisn't fair to make him the only scapegoat—now is it, sir?"

"My good woman, I—I have no such intention," stammered the mayor, glancing at the lad again, and liking his appearance worse than ever.

"I thank your Worship." Mrs. Halloran dropped a quick curtsey. "And so I made free to tell Halloran, who was in doubt of it. 'Mr. Pinsent,' I said, 'is a just-minded man, an' you may be sure,' I said, 'he'll mete out the same to all, last as well as first.'"

"Yes, yes!" The mayor took her up impatiently and paused for a moment, still eyeing the boy. "Er —by the way, what age is your son?"

"Rising fifteen, sir; christened fifteen years ago last St. Michael's Day, which is the twenty-ninth of September, though little good it done him. He takes after his father, sir. All the Hallorans shoot up tall, like runner beans; and thick in the bone. Or so his father says. For my part, I've never been to Ireland; but by the looks of en you'd say not a day less than seventeen. It seems like blood-money,

my takin' five shillin' and handin' the child over—at his tender age—and me his own mother that nursed en!"

Here Mrs. Halloran, whose emotions had been mastering her for some moments, broke down in a violent fit of sobbing; and this so affected her offspring that he emitted a noise like the hoot of a dog. As he started it without warning, so abruptly he ended it, and looked around with an impassive face.

It was uncanny. It shook the mayor's nerve. "My dear Mrs. Halloran, if you will let me have a word or two with your son——"

"Oh, I know!" she wailed. "That's how you put it. But you give me over the money, sir, and let me go quick, before I weaken on it. You never had a child of your own, Mr. Pinsent—and more's the pity for the child—but with one of your own you'd know what it feels like!"

Mr. Pinsent felt in his trouser-pocket, drew forth two half-crowns, and pressed them into Mrs. Halloran's dirty palm. With a sob and a blessing she escaped. He heard her run sobbing down the passage to the front door. Then he turned upon Mike.

The boy had sidled round with his back against the wall, and stood there with his left elbow up and his fists half clenched. For the space of half a minute the mayor eyed him, and he eyed the mayor.

"Sit down, Mike," said the mayor, gently.

"Goo! What d'ye take me for?" said Mike, lifting his hands a little.

"Sit down, I tell you."

"Huh—yes, an' let you cop me over the head? You just try it—that's all; you just come an' try it?"

"I—er—have no intention of trying it," said Mr. Pinsent. "It certainly would not become me to administer—to inflict—corporal punishment on a youth of your—er—inches. What grieves me—what pains me more than I can say, is to find a boy of your—er—size and er—development—by which I mean mental development, sense of responsibility—er—mixed up in this disgraceful affair. I had supposed it to be a prank, merely—a piece of childish mischief—and that the perpetrators were quite small boys." (Here—not a doubt of it—Mr. Pinsent was telling the truth.)

"Why," he went on, with the air of one making a pleasant little discovery, "I shouldn't be surprised to find you almost as tall as myself! Yes. I declare I believe you are quite as tall! No"—he put up hand as Mike, apparently suspecting a ruse, backed in a posture of defence—"we will not take our measures to-day. I have something more serious to think about. For you will have noticed that while I suspected this robbery to be the work of small thoughtless boys, I treated it lightly; but now that I find a great strapping fellow like you mixed up in the affair, it becomes my business to talk to you very seriously indeed."

And he did. He sat down facing Mike Halloran across the table, and read him a lecture that should have made any boy of Mike's size thoroughly ashamed of himself; and might have gone on admonishing for an hour had not Mrs. Salt knocked again at the door.

"If you please," announced Mrs. Salt, "here's the Widow Barnicutt from the Quay to see you, along with her red-headed 'Dolphus."

"Which," said the Widow Barnicutt, panting in at her heels and bobbing a curtsey, "it's sorry I am to be disturbin' your Worship, and I wouldn't do it if his poor father was alive and could give 'em the strap for his good. But the child bein' that out of hand that all my threats do seem but to harden him, and five shillin' a week's wage to an unprovided woman; and I hope your Worship will excuse the noise I make with my breathin', which is the assma, and brought on by fightin' my way through the other women."

Mr. Pinsent gasped, and put up a hand to his brow.

"The other women?" he echoed. "What other women?"

"The passage is full of 'em," said Mrs. Salt, much as though she were reporting that the house was on fire.

"Ay," said the widow, "but my 'Dolphus is the guilty one—I got his word for it."

"There's Maria Bunny," persisted Mrs. Salt, beginning to tick off the list on her fingers, "Maria Bunny with her Wesley John, and Mary Polly Polwarne with her Nine Days' Wonder, and Amelia Trownce with the twins, and Deb Hicks with the child she christened Nonesuch, thinkin' 'twas out of the Bible; and William Spargo's second wife Maria with her step-child, and Catherine Nance with her splay-footed boy that I can never remember the name of——"

"Oh! send 'em away!" bawled Mr. Pinsent. "Send 'em away before their husbands come home from work and raise a riot!" Then he recollected himself. "No, fetch 'em all in here, from the street," said he, dropping into a chair and taking his head in both hands. "Fetch 'em all in, and let me deal with 'em!"

The town, when it laughed over the story next day, found the cream of the joke in this—Bester Pinsent, in promising Mrs. Halloran that her boy should but share punishment with the rest, had forgotten in his agitation of mind to stipulate that the reward should also be divided. As it was, he had paid her the full five shillings, and the rest of the women (there were twenty-four) would be content with nothing less.

But it was really little Mr. Lupus, the schoolmaster, that—all unconsciously—had the last word.

Trotting past Butcher Trengrove's shop next morning, on his way to open school, Mr. Lupus caught sight of his Worship standing within the doorway, halted, and came across the street with a nervous flush on his face.

"Mr. Mayor, sir, if I may have a word with you? Begging your pardon, sir, but it lies on my conscience --all night, sir, it has been troubling me—that I boasted to you yesterday of my boys' good attendance. Indeed, sir, it has been good in the past. But yesterday afternoon! Oh, sir, I fear that you were right, after all, and something serious is amiss with the boys of this town!"

I regret that I cannot report here the precise words of Mr. Pinsent's reply.

NEWS FROM TROY!

TROY—not for the first time in its history—is consumed with laughter; laughter which I deprecate, while setting down as an impartial chronicler the occasion and the cause of it.

You must know that our venerable and excellent squire, Sir Felix Felix-Williams, has for some years felt our little town getting, as he puts it, "beyond him." He remembers, in his father's time, the grass growing in our streets. The few vessels that then visited the port brought American timber-props for the mines out of which the Felix-Williams estate drew its royalties, and shipped in exchange small cargoes of emigrants whom, for one reason or another, that estate was unable to support. It was a simple system, and Sir Felix has often in talk with me lamented its gradual strangulation, in his time, by the complexities of modern commerce.—You should hear, by the way, Sir Felix pronounce that favourite phrase of his "in my time"; he does it with a dignified humility, as who should say, "Observe, I am of the past indeed, but I have lent my name to an epoch."

As a fact the access of a railway to our little port, the building of jetties for the china-clay trade, the development of our harbour which now receives over 300,000 tons of shipping annually—all these have, in ways direct and indirect, more than doubled the old gentleman's income. But to do him justice, he regards this scarcely at all. He sets it down—and rightly—to what he has taken to call on public occasions "the expansion of our Imperial Greatness"; but in his heart of hearts he regrets his loosening hold on a population that was used to sit under his fig-tree and drink of his cistern. With their growth the working classes have come to prefer self-help to his honest regulation of their weal. There has been no quarrel: we all love Sir Felix and respect him, though now and then we laugh at him a good deal.

There has been no quarrel, I repeat. But insensibly we have lost the first place in his affections, which of late years have concentrated themselves more and more upon the small village of Kirris-vean, around a corner of the coast. By its mere beauty, indeed, any one might be excused for falling in love with Kirris-vean. It lies, almost within the actual shadow of Sir Felix's great house, at the foot of a steep wooded coombe, and fronts with diminutive beach and pier the blue waters of our neighbouring bay. The cottages are whitewashed and garlanded with jasmine, solanum, the monthly rose. Fuchsias bloom in their front

gardens; cabbages and runner beans climb the hillside in orderly rows at their backs. The women curtsey to a stranger; the men touch their hats; and the inhabitants are mostly advanced in years, for the young men and maidens leave the village to go into "good service" with testimonials Sir Felix takes a delight to grant, because he has seen that they are well earned. If you were to stand at the cross-roads in the middle of Eaton Square and say "Kirris-vean!" in a loud voice, it is odds (though I will not promise) that a score of faces would arise from underground and gaze out wistfully through area-railings. For no one born in Kirris-vean can ever forget it. But Kirris-vean itself is inhabited by grandparents and grandchildren (these last are known in Eaton Square as "Encumbrances"). It has a lifeboat in which Sir Felix takes a peculiar pride (but you must not launch it unless in fine weather, or the crew will fall out). It has also a model public-house, "The Three Wheatsheaves," so named from the Felix-Williams' coat of arms. The people of Troy believe—or at any rate assert—that every one in Kirris-vean is born with a complete suit of gilt buttons bearing that device.

Few dissipations ripple the gentle flow—which it were more descriptive perhaps to call stagnation—of life in that model village. From week-end to week-end scarcely a boat puts forth from the shelter of its weed-coated pier; for though Kirris-vean wears the

aspect of a place of fishery, it is in fact nothing of the kind. Its inhabitants—blue-jerseyed males and sun-bonneted females—sit comfortably on their pensions and tempt no perils of the deep. Why should they risk shortening such lives as theirs? A few crab-pots—"accessories," as a painter would say—rest on the beach above high-water mark, the summer through; a few tanned nets hang, and have hung for years, a-drying against the wall of the school-house. But the prevalent odour is of honeysuckle. The aged coxswain of the lifeboat reported to me last year that an American visitor had asked him how, dwelling remote from the railway, the population dealt with its fish. "My dear man," said I, "you should have told him that you get it by Parcels' Post from Billingsgate."

I never know—never in this life shall I discover—how rumour operates in Troy, how it arrives or is spread. Early in August a rumour, incredible on the face of it, reached me that Kirris-vean intended a Regatta! . . . For a week I disbelieved it; for almost another week I forgot it; and then lo! Sir Felix himself called on me and confirmed it.

A trio of young footmen (it appeared) had arrived in Kirris-vean to spend a holiday on board-wages—their several employers having gone northward for the grouse, to incommodious shooting-boxes where a few servants sufficed. Finding themselves at a loose end (to use their own phrase for it) these three young men

had hit on the wild—the happy—the almost delirious idea of a Regatta; and taking their courage in their hands had sought an interview with Sir Felix, to entreat his patronage for the scheme. They had found him in his most amiable mood, and within an hour—the old gentleman is discursive—he had consented to become Patron and President and to honour the gathering with his presence. But observe; the idea cannot have originated before August the 12th, on which day the trio arrived from London; yet a whisper of it had reached me on the 2nd or 3rd. I repeat that I shall never understand the operation of rumour in Troy.

Sir Felix, having somewhat rashly given his consent, in a cooler hour began to foresee difficulties, and drove into Troy to impart them to me. I know not why, on occasions of doubt and embarrassment such as this, he ever throws himself (so to speak) on my bosom; but so it is. The Regatta, he explained, ought to take place in August, and we were already arrived at the middle of the month, Tuesday the 24th had been suggested—a very convenient date for him: it was, as I might remember, the day before Petty Sessions, immediately after which he had as good as promised to visit his second son in Devonshire and attend the christening of an infant grandchild. But would ten days allow us time to organise the "events," hire a band, issue the necessary posters, etc.?

I assured him that, hard as it might drive us, the thing could be done. "I shall feel vastly more confident," he was good enough to say, "if you will consent to join our Committee." And I accepted, on the prospect of seeing some fun. But ah! could I have foreseen *what* fun!

"You relieve my mind, indeed. . . . And—er—perhaps you might also help us by officiating as starter and—er—judge, or timekeeper?"

"Willingly," said I; "in any capacity the Committee may wish."

"They will be more inclined to trust the decisions of one who—er—does not live among them."

"Is that so?" said I. "In Kirris-vean, one would have thought—but, after all, I shall have to forego whatever public confidence depends on the competitors being unacquainted with me, since two-thirds of them will come to you from Troy."

"You are sure?"

"Quite. Has it not struck you, Sir Felix, that Kirris-vean—ideal spot for a regatta—has in itself neither the boats nor the men for one?"

"We might fill up with a launch of the lifeboat," he hazarded.

"If one could only be certain of the weather."

"And a public tea, and a procession of the school children."

"Admirable," I agreed. "Never fear, we will make up a programme."

"Oh, and—er—by the way, Bates of the 'Wheatsheaf' came to me this morning for an Occasional Licence. He proposes to erect a booth in his back garden. You see no objection?"

"None at all."

"A most trustworthy man. . . . He could not apply, you see, at our last Petty Sessions because he did not then know that a regatta was contemplated; and the 25th will, of course, be too late. But the licence can be granted under these circumstances by any two magistrates sitting together; and I would suggest that you and I——"

"Certainly," said I, and accompanied Sir Felix to the small room that serves Troy for an occasional court-house, where we solemnly granted Bates his licence.

There is a something about Sir Felix that tempts to garrulity, and I could fill pages here with an account of our preparations for the Regatta; the daily visits he paid me—always in a fuss, and five times out of six over some trivial difficulty that had assailed him in the still watches of the night; the protracted meetings of Committee in the upper chamber of the lifeboat-house at Kirris-vean. But these meetings, and the suggestions Sir Felix made, and the votes we took upon them, are they not recorded in the minute-book of the First and Last Kirris-vean Regatta? Yes,

thus I have to write it, and with sorrow: there will never be another Regatta in that Arcadian village.

Sir Felix, good man, started with a fixed idea that a regatta differed from a Primrose Fête, if at all, then only in being non-political. He could not get it out of his head that public speeches were of the essence of the festivity; and when, with all the tact at my command, I insisted on aquatics, he countered me by proposing to invite down a lecturer from the Navy League! As he put it in the heat of argument, "Weren't eight *Dreadnoughts* aquatic enough for anybody?" But in the voting the three young footmen supported me nobly. *They* wanted fireworks, and were not wasting any money on lecturers: also there was a feeling in Kirris-vean that, while a regatta could scarcely be held without boat-racing, the prizes should be just sufficient to attract competitors and yet on a scale provoking no one to grumble at the amount of subscribed money lost to the village. A free public tea was suggested. I resisted this largesse; and we compromised on "No Charge for Bonâ-fide School-children"—whatever that might mean—and "Fourpence a head for Adults."

The weather prospects, as the moment drew near, filled us with anxious forebodings, for the anti-cyclonic spell showed signs of breaking, and the Sunday and Monday wore lowering faces. But Tuesday dawned brilliantly; and when after a hasty breakfast I walked

over to Kirris-vean, I found Sir Felix waiting for me at the top of the hill in his open landau, with a smile on his face, a rose in his button-hole, and a white waistcoat that put all misgivings to shame. "A perfect day!" he called out with a wave of the hand.

"A foxy one," I suggested, and pointed out that the wind sat in a doubtful quarter, that it was backing against the sun, that it was light and might at any time die away and cheat us of our sailing matches.

"Always the boats with you!" he rallied me; "my dear sir, it is going to be perfect. As the song says, 'We've got the ships, we've got the men, and we've got the money too.' An entire success, you may take my word for it!"

We descended the hill to find the village gay with bunting, the competing boats lying ready off the pier, a sizeable crowd already gathered, and the Committee awaiting us at the beach-head. Each committee-man wore a favour of blue-and-white ribbon, and upon our arrival every hat flew off to Sir Felix, while the band played "See the Conquering Hero Comes!"

It was, not to put too fine a point on the description, an atrocious band. It had come from afar, from one of the inland china-clay villages, and in hiring it the Committee had been constant to its principle that no more money than was necessary should be allowed to go out of Kirris-vean. Report—malicious, I feel sure—reached me later, that, at the first note of it,

an aloe in Sir Felix's gardens, a mile away—a plant noted for blossoming once only in a hundred years—burst into profuse and instantaneous bloom. Sir Felix himself, who abounded all day in happy turns of speech, said the best thing of this band. He said it was *sui generis*.

He was magnificent throughout. I am not going to describe the Regatta, for sterner events hurry my pen forward. So let me only say that the weather completely justified his cheery optimism; that the breeze, though slight, held throughout the sailing events and then dropped, leaving the bay glassy as a lake for the rowers; that sports ashore—three-legged races, egg-and-spoon races, sack races, races for young men, races for old women, donkey races, a tug-of-war, a greasy pole, a miller-and-sweep combat—filled the afternoon until tea-time; that at tea the tables groaned with piles of saffron cake and cream "splitters"; and that when the company had, in Homeric phrase—the only fit one for such a tea—put aside from them the desire of meat and drink, Sir Felix stood up and made a speech.

It was an admirable speech too. It began with "My dear friends," and the exordium struck at once that paternal note which makes him, with all his foibles, so lovable. "They must excuse him if he now took his departure; for he had arrived at an age to feel the length of a long day—even of a happy

summer's day such as this had been. To be innocently happy—that had used to be the boast of England, of 'Merry England'; and he had ever prized happy living faces in Kirris-vean above the ancestral portraits—not all happy, if one might judge from their expressions—hanging on his walls at home." (Prolonged applause greeted this; and deservedly, for he spoke no more than he meant.) He became reminiscential, and singling out a school-child here and there, discoursed of their grandparents, even of their great-grandparents; recalled himself to pay a series of graceful tributes to all who had contributed to make the day a success; and wound up by regretting that he could not stay for the fireworks.

Dear honest Sir Felix! I can see him now, bareheaded, his white hairs lightly fluttered by the evening breeze that fluttered also the flags above Mr. Bates's booth immediately in his rear; the sunset light on his broad immaculate waistcoat; the long tea-tables, with their rows of faces all turned deferentially towards him; the shadows slanting from the trees; the still expanse of the bay, and far across the bay a bank of clouds softly, imperceptibly marshalling.

We cheered him to the echo, of course. At his invitation I walked some way up the hill with him, to meet his carriage. He halted three or four times in the road, still talking of the day's success. He was even somewhat tremulous at parting.

"I shall see you to-morrow, at Tregantick?"—Tregantick is the centre of the eight parishes included in our Petty Sessional Division, and the seat of such justice as I and seven others help Sir Felix to administer.

"Oh, assuredly," said I.

I watched his carriage as it rounded the bend of the road, and so faced about to return to the village. But I took second thought at sight of the clouds massing across the bay and coming up—as it seemed to me against the wind. They spelt thunder. In spite of my early forebodings I had brought no mackintosh; my duties as a Committee-man were over: and I have reached an age when fireworks give me no more pleasure than I can cheerfully forego or take for granted. I had, having coming thus far on my homeward way, already more than half a mind to pursue it, when the band started to render the "Merry Duchess" waltz, with reed instruments a semitone below the brass. This decided me, and I reached my door as the first raindrops fell.

When I awoke next morning it was still raining, and raining hard. The thunderstorm had passed; but a westerly wind, following hard on it, had collected much water from the Atlantic, and the heavens were thick as a blanket. A tramp in the rain, however, seldom comes amiss to me, and I trudged the three miles to the court-house in very cheerful mood, now

smoking, now pocketing my pipe to inhale those first delicious scents of autumn, stored up by summer for a long day of downpour.

Our Court meets at 11.15, and I timed myself (so well I know the road in all weathers) to reach the magistrates' door on the stroke of the quarter. Now Sir Felix, as Chairman, makes a point of arriving ten or fifteen minutes ahead of time, for a preliminary chat with the Clerk over the charge-sheet and any small details of business. I was astonished, therefore, when, turning at the sound of wheels, I beheld Sir Felix's carriage and pair descending the street behind me. "Truly the Regatta must have unsettled his habits," I murmured; and then, catching the eye of one of the pair of constables posted at the door, I gazed again and stood, as some of my fellow-novelists say, "transfixed." For the driver on the box was neither Sir Felix's coachman, nor his second coachman, nor yet again one of his stablemen; but a gardener, and a tenth-down under-gardener at that; in fact, you could scarcely call him even an under-gardener, though he did odd jobs about the gardens. To be short, it was Tommy Collins, a hydrocephalous youth generally supposed to be half-baked, or, as we put it in Cornwall, "not exactly"; and on his immense head, crowning a livery suit which patently did not belong to him, Tommy Collins wore a dilapidated billycock hat.

As the carriage drew up I noted with a lesser shock that the harness was wrongly crossed: and with that, as one constable stepped forward to open the carriage door, I saw the other wink and make a sign to Tommy, who—quick-witted for once—snatched off his billy-cock and held it low against his thigh on the off-side, pretending to shake off the rain, but in reality using this device to conceal the horrid thing. At the same time the other constable, receiving an umbrella which Sir Felix thrust forth, opened it with remarkable dexterity, and held it low over my friend's venerable head, thus screening from sight the disreputable figure on the box. As a piece of smuggling it was extremely neat; but as I turned to follow I heard Tommy Collins ask, and almost with a groan:

"Wot's the use?"

Four of our fellow-magistrates were already gathered in the little room at the rear of the court-house: of whom the first to greet our Chairman was Lord Rattley. Lord Rattley, a peer with very little money and a somewhat indecorous past, rarely honours the Tregantick bench by attending sessions; but for once he was here, and at once started to banter Sir Felix on his unpunctuality.

"Very sorry, gentlemen; very sorry—most inexplicable," stuttered Sir Felix, who suffers from a slight impediment of the speech when hurried. "Servants at home seemed—conspired—detain me.

Jukes"—Jukes is Sir Felix's butler, an aged retainer of the best pattern—"Jukes would have it, weather too inclement. Poof! I am not too old, I hope, to stand a few drops of rain. Next he brings word that Adamson"—Adamson is (or was) Sir Felix's trusted coachman—"is indisposed and unable to drive me. 'Then I'll have Walters,' said I, losing my temper, 'or I'll drive myself.' Jukes must be failing: and so must Walters be, for that matter. We might have arrived ten minutes ago, but he drove execrably."

"Reminds me——" began Lord Rattley, when Sir Felix—who is ever nervous of that nobleman's reminiscences, and had by this time divested himself of his Inverness cape, turned to the Clerk and demanded news of a lad discharged at the last Sessions on his own and parents' recognisances, to be given another chance under the eye of our new Probation Officer.

"—of a coachman I once had called Oke—William Oke," continued Lord Rattley, imperturably. "Drunken little sot he was, but understood horses. One night I had out the brougham and drove into Bodmin to mess with the Militia. The old Royal Cornwall Rangers messed at the hotel in those days, in the long room they used for Assemblies. About eleven o'clock I sent for my carriage, and along it came in due course. Well, I dare say at that hour I wasn't myself in a condition to be critical of Oke's——"

Sir Felix pulled out his watch, and asked me what I made the time.

"Off we drove," pursued Lord Rattley, ignoring this hint, "and I must have dropped asleep at once. When I awoke the blessed vehicle had come to a standstill. I called to Oke—no answer: so by-and-by I opened the carriage door and stepped out. The horses had slewed themselves in towards the hedge and were cropping peaceably: but no Oke was on the box and still no Oke answered from anywhere when I shouted. He had, as a fact, tumbled clean off the box half a mile astern, and was lying at that moment in the middle of the road. At that hour I had no mind to look for him, so I collected the reins somehow, climbed up in front, and drove myself home. I had a butler then by the name of Ibbetson—a most respectable man, with the face of a Bible Christian minister; and, thought I, on my way up the drive, 'I'll give Ibbetson a small scare.' So coming to the porch, when Ibbetson heard the wheels and cast the door open, I kept my seat like a rock. Pretty well pitch dark it was where I sat behind the lamps. Ibbetson comes down the steps, opens the carriage door and stands aside. After a moment he begins to breathe hard, pops his head into the brougham, then his arm, feels about a bit, and comes forward for a lamp. 'My God, Bill!' says Ibbetson, looking up at me in the dark. 'What have you done with th' ould devil?'"

"I really think," suggested Sir Felix hurriedly, "we ought not to keep the Court waiting."

So in we filed, and the Court rose respectfully to its feet and stood while we took our seats. The Superintendent of Police—an officer new to our Division—gazed at me with a perfectly stolid face across the baize-covered table. Yet somehow it struck me that the atmosphere in Court was not, as usual, merely stuffy, but electrical; that the faces of our old and tried constabulary twitched with some suppressed excitement; and that the Clerk was fidgeting with an attack of nerves.

"Certain supplementary cases, your Worship," said he, taking a small sheaf of papers from the hands of his underling, "too late to be included on the charge-sheet issued."

"Eh?—Oh, certainly—certainly!" Sir Felix drew his spectacle case from his waistcoat pocket and laid it on the table; took the paper handed to him, and slipped it methodically beneath the sheet of agenda; resumed the business of extracting his spectacles, adjusted them, and gravely opened business.

He had it all to himself. For me, as I, too, received the paper of supplementary cases, my first thought was of simple astonishment at the length of the list. Then my gaze stiffened upon certain names, and by degrees as I recognized them, my whole body grew rigid in my chair. Samuel Sleeman—this was the

Superintendent's name—appellant against Isaac Adamson, drunk and disorderly; Ditto against Duncan McPhae, drunk and disorderly; Ditto against Henry James Walters, drunk and disorderly; Ditto against Selina Mary Wilkins, drunk on licensed premises; Ditto against Mary Curtis, drunk on licensed premises; Ditto against Solomon Tregaskis, drunk on highway.... There were no less than twenty-four names on the list; and each was the name of a retainer or pensioner of Sir Felix—those aged Arcadians of Kirris-vean.

I glanced along the table and winced as I met Sir Felix's eyes. He was inclining towards me. "Five shillings and costs will meet this case, eh?" he was asking. I nodded, though without a notion of what case we were hearing. (It turned out to be one of cattle-straying, so no great harm was done.) Beyond him I saw Lord Rattley covering an infernally wicked grin with his arched palm; beyond Lord Rattley two estimable magistrates staring at that fatal supplementary paper as though they had dined and this was a bill they found themselves wholly unable to meet.

Sir Felix from time to time finds his awards of justice gently disputed. No one disputed them today. Lord Rattley, whose language is younger than his years, declared afterwards—between explosions of indecent mirth—that we left the floor to the old man, and he waltzed. He fined three parents for not sending

their children to school, made out an attendance order upon another, mulcted a youth in five shillings for riding a bicycle without a light, charged a navvy ten shillings and costs for use of indelicate language (total, seventeen and sixpence), and threatened, but did not punish, a farmer with imprisonment for working a horse "when," as the charge put it ambiguously, "in an unfit state." He wound up by transferring an alehouse licence, still in his stride, beamed around and observed "That concludes our business, I think—eh, Mr. Clerk?"

"Supplementary cases, y'r Worship," murmured the Clerk. "If I may remind—paper handed to y'r Worship——"

"Eh? Yes, to be sure——"

"Number of cases, drunk and disorderly: arising —as I understand—out of Regatta held yesterday at Kirris-vean."

The Superintendent arose. He is an amazingly tall man, and it seemed to me that he took an amazingly long time in arising to his full height.

"Impossible to accommodate them all in the cells, y'r Worship. If I may say so, the police were hard worked all night. Mercifully"—the Superintendent laid stress on the word, and I shall always, when I think of it, remember to thank him—"the most of 'em were *blind*. We laid 'em out on the floor of the charge-room, and with scarcely an exception,

as I am credibly informed, they've come to, more or less."

"Kirris-vean?" I saw Sir Felix's hands grip the arms of his chair. Then he put them out and fumbled with his papers. Lord Rattley obligingly pushed forward his copy of the list.

"Shall I have the defendants brought into Court at once?" asked the Superintendent. "The constables tell me that they are—er—mostly, by this time, in a condition to understand, for all practical purposes, the meaning of an oath."

Sir Felix has—as I have hinted—his foibles. But he is an English gentleman and a man of courage. He gasped, waved a hand, and sat up firmly.

He must have needed courage indeed, as the sorry culprits filed into Court: for I verily believe he felt more shame than they, though their appearance might be held to prove this impossible. The police at about eleven o'clock had raided the booth of that respectable landlord, Mr. Bates ("Which," observed the Superintendent, stonily, "we may 'ave somethink to say to 'im, as it were, by-and-by") and had culled some of them—even as one picks the unresisting primrose, others not without recourse to persuasion. "Many of 'em," the Superintendent explained, "showed a liveliness you wouldn't believe. It was, in a manner of speaking, beyond anythink y'r Worships would expect." He paused a moment, cleared his throat, and achieved

this really fine phrase: "It was, for their united ages, in a manner of speaking, a knock-out."

I see them now as they filed into court—yellow in the gills, shaking between present fear and the ebb of excess. But I see Sir Felix also, a trifle red in the face, gripping the arms of his chair, bending forward and confronting them.

For a moment I imagined he meant to address them as a crowd. But his fine sense of business prevailed, and he signed to the Clerk to read the first charge.

He dealt with the charges, one by one, and in detail. Alone he inflicted the fines, while we sat and listened with eyes glued upon the baize table. And the fines were heavy—too heavy. It was not for us to interfere.

At the end I expected some few words of general rebuke. I believe the culprits themselves would have been glad of a tongue-lashing. But he uttered none. To the end he dealt out justice, none aiding him; and when the business was over, pushed back his chair.

We filed out after him. I believe that he has paid all the fines out of his own pocket.

And Troy laughs. But I believe it is safe to say that, while Sir Felix lives, Kirris-vean will not hold a second Regatta.

COLONEL BAIGENT'S CHRISTMAS

OUTSIDE the railway-station Colonel Baigent handed his carpet-bag to the conductor of the hotel omnibus, and stood for a moment peering about in the dusk, as if to take his bearings.

"For 'The Dragon,' sir?' asked the conductor.

"'The Dragon?' Yes, certainly," echoed Colonel Baigent, aroused by the name from the beginnings of a brown study. "So 'The Dragon' is still standing, eh?"

"'Twas standing all right when I left it, twenty minutes ago," the man answered flippantly; for to-night was Christmas Eve, and English hotel servants do not welcome guests who stay over Christmas.

But the colonel remarked nothing amiss in his tone. In fact, he was not listening. He stared out into the mirk beyond the flare of gas in the entrance-way, slowly bringing his mind to bear on the city at his feet, with its maze of dotted lights. The afternoon had been cold and gusty, with now and then a squall of hail from the north-west. The mass of the station buildings behind him blotted out whatever of

daylight yet lingered. Eastward a sullen retreating cloud backed the luminous haze thrown up from hundreds of street-lamps and shop-windows—a haze that faintly silhouetted the clustered roofs. The roofs were wet. The roadway, narrowing as it descended the hill, shone with recent rain.

"You may carry down my bag," said the colonel. "I will walk. Somewhere to the right here should be a road leading to Westgate, eh?"

"'Tisn't the shortest way," the conductor objected.

"I have plenty of time," said the colonel, mildly.

Indeed, a milder-looking man for a hero—he had earned and won his V.C.—or a gentler of address, could scarcely be conceived; or an older-fashioned. His voice, to be sure, had a latent tone of command. But the patient face, with its drooping moustache and long grey side-whiskers; the short yet attenuated figure, in a tweed suit of no particular cut; the round felt hat, cheap tie, and elastic-sided boots—all these failed very signally to impress the conductor, who flung the carpet-bag inside the omnibus with small ceremony, and banged the door.

"Right, Bill!" he called.

"'Oo is it?" asked the driver, slewing round in he light of his near-side lamp.

"Might be a commercial—if 'twasn't for his bag, and his way of speakin'."

The omnibus rattled off and down the hill. Colonel

Baigent gazed after it, alone beneath the gas-lamp; for the few passengers who had alighted from his train had jostled past him and gone their ways, and his porter had turned back wearily into the station, where express and excursion train had all day been running the Christmas traffic down to its last lees.

Colonel Baigent gazed after the omnibus, then back through the passage-way leading past the booking-office to the platform. All this was new to him. There had been no such thing as railway or railway-station thirty-five years ago, when, a boy of seventeen just emancipated from school, he had climbed to the box-seat of the then famous "Highflyer" coach, and been driven homewards to a Christmas in which the old sense of holiday mingled and confused itself with a new and wonderful feeling that school was over and done with for ever.

During his Indian exile he had nursed a long affection for the city; had collected and pored over books relating to it and its antiquities; and now, as he left the station and struck boldly into the footway on the right, he found himself surprisingly at home. The path led him over a footbridge, and along between high garden walls. But it led him surely enough to Westgate, and the spot occupied in Norman times (as he recalled) by five bordels or shanties, where any belated traveller ("such as I to-night," thought the colonel) arriving after the gates were shut, might find

hospitality for the love of God. The suburb here lay deserted. He halted, and listened to a footfall that died away into the darkness on his right. He felt at home again—here, wrapped around by the ghostly centuries as by the folds of a mantle, and warm within the folds.

Strange to say, the chill came on him as he passed under the arch of Westgate, and into view of the busy High Street, the lit shops, the passers-by jostling upon the pavements, the running newsboys, the hawkers with their barrows, the soldiers strolling five abreast down the middle of the roadway. Here was the whole city coming and going. Here, precisely as he had left it thirty-five years ago, it sprang back into life again, like an illuminated clockwork. No; he was wrong, of course. It had been working all the while, and without intermission, absorbed in its own business—buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage. He had dropped out, that was all.

The Christmas decorations, the jollity in the voices exchanging Christmas salutations, aggravated the poor colonel's sense of homelessness, and seemed to mock it. One window displayed a huge boar's head, grinning, with a lemon in its mouth. The proprietor of another had hung his seasonable wares on a small spruce fir, and lit it all over with coloured candles. A poulterer, three doors away, had draped his house-front, from the third storey down, with what at first glance

appeared to be a single heavy curtain of furs and feathers—string upon string of hares, of pheasants, of turkeys, fat geese, wild ducks.

This prevailing superabundant good cheer did not, however, extend to the visitor, as the colonel discovered, within the doorway of the "The Dragon." Nor was that doorway the old hospitable entrance through which the stage-coaches had rattled into a paved court lined with red-windowed offices. The new proprietor had blocked all this up with a flight of steps, and an arrangement of mahogany and plate glass. There remained but the arch under which, these years ago, the stout coachman, as he swung his leaders sharp round to the entry, had warned passengers to duck their heads. The colonel was staring up at it when he became aware of a liveried boots holding the mahogany door open for him at the head of the steps, and with an expression that did not include "Welcome!" among the many things that it said.

The boots too plainly was sullen, the young lady in the office curt and off-hand, the second and only waiter as nearly as possible mutinous. "All his blooming companions," he explained (though not precisely in these words), had departed to spend Christmas in the bosom of their families. He spoke cockney English, and, in reply to a question (for the colonel tried hard to draw him into conversation and

dissipate his gloom), confessed that he came from Brixton.

Further than this he would not go. In a mortuary silence, the colonel, seated beneath a gaselier adorned (the mockery of it!) with a sprig of mistletoe, sipped his half-pint of sherry, and ate his way through three courses of a sufficiently good dinner. But better, says Solomon, is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.

Every time he raised his eyes they rested on the table at which he had dined with his father on the eve of being entered at school. The same table, the same heavy mahogany chairs—he recalled the scroll pattern on their backs. He could see himself there in the corner—a small boy, white in the face and weary with travel, divided between surmise of the morrow and tears for the home left behind. He could see his father seated there in profile, the iron-grey hair, the remembered stoop. Well, they were all gone now—all, missing whom that night he had come so near to breaking down and weeping. . . . Mother, sisters, brother, gone one by one during the years of his Indian exile, and himself now left the last of his race, unmarried, and never likely to marry. Why had he come? To revisit his old school? But the school would be closed for the Christmas holidays, the children dispersed to their homes and happy.

Limen amabile
Matris et oscula

He had ordered claret—a bottle of Lafitte, the best the house could produce—and the waiter, impressed a little by the choice, now appeared noiselessly, almost deferentially, at his elbow, and poured out a first glassful of the wine.

"Waiter!"

"Yessir!"

"Where does that music come from?"—for the sound of an antiquated piano had been thrumming for some minutes from a distant room. The music was not ambitious—an old set of quadrille tunes. The colonel did not recognize it. He had no ear at all for music, and could just distinguish the quick-step of his regiment from "God save the Queen." In fact, when he paid any attention at all to music (and this was rare), it gave him no sensation beyond a vague discomfort.

"It comes from the Assembly Room, sir, at the back of the court."

"Ah! yes, I remember the old Assembly Room. Some one is giving a ball to-night?"

The waiter smiled indulgently. "Oh no, sir! It's Miss Wallas's dancing-class breaking up—that's all."

"Breaking up?" echoed the colonel, whose mind was sometimes a trifle slow in the uptake.

"She rents the room alternate Fridays, sir, and usually gives 'em a little treat just before Christmas. I don't know," pursued the waiter, meditatively laying

two fingers wide on his chin, "as many people would call it a treat. But the little 'uns likes dressing up in their evening frocks, and the buns and lemonade is well enough for their time of life. There used to be a fiddle too, as well as the piano; but the class hev fallen off considerable of late. The management don't like it too well. But there's a notion 'twould be unfeelin' to stop it. She's been carrying it on all these years, and her aunt before her. But if it annoys you, sir, I can say a word at the office and get it stopped."

"Heaven forbid!" said the colonel. But the music made him uncomfortable, nevertheless. It broke off, and started again upon a waltz tune. After the waltz came a mazurka, and after the mazurka another set of quadrilles. And still, as he sipped his claret, the successive tunes wove themselves into old memories haunting the coffee-room—ghostly memories! Yet he had no will to escape them. Outside he could see the crowd jostling to and fro on the opposite pavement. The lights within a chemist's shop, shining through bottles of coloured water in its window, threw splashes of colour—green, crimson, orange—on the eager faces as they went by. Colonel Baigent rose half impatiently, drew down the blind, and, returning to his chair, sat alone with the ghosts.

The waiter brought dessert—a plateful of walnuts and dried figs. He cracked a walnut and peeled it

slowly, still busy with his thoughts. For a while these thoughts were all in a far past; but by-and-by a stray thread carried him down to the year 'fifty-seven—and snapped suddenly. His thoughts always broke off suddenly at the year 'fifty-seven—the Mutiny year. In that year he had won his Victoria Cross and, along with it, a curious tone in his voice, an inexpressible gentleness with all women and children, certain ineradicable lines in his face (hidden though they were by his drooping moustache and absurd old-fashioned whiskers); also a certain very grave simplicity when addressing the Almighty in his prayers. But he never thought of the year 'fifty-seven if he could help it. And as a spider, its thread snapping, drops upon the floor, so Colonel Baigent fell to earth out of his dreaming.

With a sudden impulse of his hands against the table's edge, he thrust back the chair and stood erect. His bottle of claret was all but empty, and he bethought him that he had left his cigar-case upstairs. His bedroom lay on the farther side of the courtyard, and on his way to it he passed the tall windows of the Assembly Room close enough to fling a glance inside.

The dancers were all children—little girls of all ages from eight to fourteen, in pretty frocks of muslin—pink, blue, and white; with a sprinkling of awkward boys in various fashion of evening dress.

On his way back, having lit his cigar, he paused for a longer look. The piano was tinkling energetically, the company dancing a polka, and with a will. The boys were certainly an awkward lot, so the Colonel decided, and forthwith remembered his own first pair of white kid gloves and the horrible self-consciousness he had indued with them. He went back to the room where the waiter had laid his coffee.

The polka, as it proved, was the last dance on the programme; for the colonel had scarcely settled himself again before the piano strummed out "God save the Queen"—which, as has been said, was one of the tunes he knew. He stood erect, alone in the empty room, and so waited gravely for the last bar. A rush of feet followed; a pause for robing; then childish voices in the courtyard wishing each other "Good night!" and "A merry Christmas!" Then a very long pause, and the colonel supposed that all the young guests were gone.

But they were not all gone; for as he resumed his seat, and reached out a hand for his case, to choose another cigar, he happened to throw a glance towards the doorway. And there, in the shadow of a heavy curtain draping it, stood a little girl.

She might have passed for a picture of Red Riding-Hood; for she wore a small scarlet cloak over her muslin frock, and the hood of it had been pulled forward and covered all but a margin of hair above

the brows. The colour of her hair was a bright auburn, that of her eyebrows so darkly brown as to seem well-nigh black; and altogether she made a remarkable little figure, standing there in the doorway, with a pair of white satin dancing-shoes clutched in her hand.

"Oh!" said the colonel. "Good evening!"

"O-o-oh!" answered the child, and with a catch, as it were, and a thrill in the voice that astonished him. Her eyes, fixed on his, grew larger and rounder. She came a pace or two towards him on tiptoe, halted, clasped both hands over her dancing-shoes, and exclaimed, with a deeper thrill than before:

"You are Colonel Baigent!"

"Eh?" The colonel sat bolt upright.

"Yes; and Aunt Louisa will be glad!"

He put a hand up to the crown of his head. "Good Lord!" he murmured, staring wildly around the room, and then slowly fastening his gaze upon the child—at most she could not be more than nine years old—confronting him. "Good Lord! Will she?"

"Yes; and so am I!" She nodded, and her eyes seemed to be devouring while they worshipped him. "But wasn't it clever of me to know you at once?"

"It's—it's about the cleverest thing I've come across in all my born days," stammered Colonel

Baigent, collapsing into his chair, and then suddenly clutching the arms of it and peering forward.

"But, of course, I've known you for ever so long, really," she went on, and nodded again as if to reassure him.

"Oh! 'of course,' is it? I—I say, won't you sit down and have a nut or two—or a fig?"

"Thank you." She gave him quite a grown-up bow, and seated herself. "I'll take a fig; nuts give you the indigestion at this time of night." She picked up a fig demurely, and laid it on a plate he pushed towards her. "I hope I'm behaving nicely?" she said, looking up at him with the most engaging candour; "because Aunt Louisa says you always had the most beautiful manners. In fact, that's what made her take to you, long—oh! ever so long—before you became famous. And now you're the Bayard of India!"

"But, excuse me——"

She had begun to munch her fig, but interrupted him with another nod.

"Yes, I know what you are going to say. That's the name they give to another general out in India, don't they? But Aunt Louisa declares he won't hold a candle to you—though I don't know why he should want to do anything of the sort."

"It's uncommonly kind of your Aunt Louisa——" he began again.

"Do you know her?" the child asked, with disconcerting directness.

"That's just the trouble with me," Colonel Baigent confessed.

"She is my great-aunt, really. She lives in Little Swithun, right at the back of Dean's Close; and her name is on a brass plate—a very hard name to pronounce, 'Miss Lapenotière, Dancing and Calisthenics'—that's another hard word, but it means things you do with an elastic band to improve your figure. The plate doesn't azackly tell the truth, because she has been an invalid for years now, and Aunt Netta—that's my other aunt—had to carry on the business. But everybody knows about it, so there really is no deceit. Aunt Netta's name is Wallas, and so is mine. Her mother was sister to Aunt Louisa, and she tells us we come of very good family. She never married. I don't believe she ever wanted to marry anybody but you, and now it's too late. But I call it splendid, your turning up like this. And on Christmas Eve, too!"

"It's beginning to be splendid," owned the colonel, who had partly recovered himself. "Unhappily—since you put it so—it is, I fear, a fact that I never met your Aunt Louisa."

"Oh! but you did—in the street, and once in the post-office, when you were a boy at the college."

"Such impressions are fleeting, my dear, as you will live to prove. Your other aunt, Miss Netta——"

"Oh! she will have been born after your time," said the child, with calm, unconscious cruelty. "But you will see her presently. She has gone to the bar to pay the bill, and when she has finished disputing it she is bound to call for me."

As if it had been waiting to confirm the prophecy, a voice called, "Charis! Charis!" almost on the instant.

"That's my name," said the child, helping herself to another fig, as a middle-aged face, wrinkled, with a complexion of parchment under a mass of tow-coloured hair, peered in at the doorway.

The colonel rose. "Your niece, madam," he began, "has been entertaining me for these ten minutes——"

With that he stopped, perceiving that, after a second glance at him, the eyes of Aunt Netta, too, were growing round in her head.

"Charis, you naughty child! Sir, I do hope—but she has been troubling you, I am sure——" stammered Aunt Netta, and came to a full stop.

Charis clapped her hands, with a triumphant little laugh.

"But I knew him first!" she exclaimed. "Yes, Aunt Netta, it's him!—it's him, *him*, HIM! And isn't it just perfectly glorious?"

"You must excuse my niece, sir—that is to say, if you are really Colonel——"

"Baigent, ma'am. I think you know my name;

though how or why that should be, passes my comprehension."

She bowed to him, timidly, a trifle stiffly. "It is an honour to have met you, sir. I have an aunt at home, an invalid, who will be very proud when she hears of this. She has followed your career with great interest—I believe I may say, ever since you were a boy at the college. She has talked about you so often, you must forgive the child for being excited. Come, Charis! Thank Colonel Baigent, and say good night."

"But isn't he coming with us?" The child's face fell, and her voice was full of dismay. "Oh! but you must! Aunt Louisa will cry her eyes out if you don't. And on Christmas Eve, too!"

Colonel Baigent looked at Miss Netta.

"I couldn't ask it—I really couldn't," she murmured.

He smiled. "The hour is unconventional, to be sure. But if your aunt will forgive a very brief call, there is nothing would give me greater pleasure."

He meant it, too!

He fetched his hat, and the three passed out together—down the High Street, through the passage by the Butter Cross, and along the railed pavement by the Minster Close. On the colonel's ear their three footfalls sounded as though a dream.

The vast bulk of the minster, glimmering above the leafless elms, the solid Norman tower with its edges bathed in starlight, were transient things, born of faëry, unsubstantial as the small figure that tripped ahead of him clutching a pair of dancing-shoes.

They came to a little low house, hooded with dark tiles and deeply set in a narrow garden. A dwarf wall and paling divided it from the Close, and from the gate, where a brass plate twinkled, a flagged, uneven pathway led up to the front door. So remote it lay from all traffic, so well screened by the shadow of the minster, that the inmates had not troubled to draw blind or curtain. Miss Netta, pausing while she fumbled for the latchkey, explained that her aunt had a fancy to keep the blinds up, so that when the minster was lit for evensong she might watch the warm, painted windows without moving from her couch.

Colonel Baigent, glancing at the pane towards which she waved a hand, caught one glimpse of the room within, and stood still, with a catch of his breath. On the wall facing him hung an Oxford frame, and in the frame was a cheap woodcut, clipped from an old illustrated paper of the Mutiny date, and fastened in that place of honour—his own portrait!

After that, for a few minutes, his head swam. He was dimly aware of what followed: of an open door; of the child running past him and into the room with

cries of joy and explanation, a few only articulate; of the little old figure that half rose from the couch and sank back trembling; the flush on the waxen face, the violet ribbons in the cap, the hand that trembled as it reached out, incredulous in its humility, to his own. He took it, and her other hand rested a moment on the back of his, as though it fluttered a blessing.

Yes; and her hands, when he released them—and it seemed that he had been holding an imprisoned bird—yet trembled on the coverlet after her voice had found steadiness.

"An honour—a great honour!" it was saying. "You will forgive the liberty?" She nodded towards the portrait. "We are not quite strangers, you see. I have always followed your career, sir. I knew you would grow into a great and worthy man, ever since the day when I dropped a bandbox in the street—a muddy day it was!—and the box burst open just as you were passing with half a dozen young gentlemen from the college. The rest laughed; and when I began to cry—for the ribbons were muddied—they laughed still more. Do you remember?"

Colonel Baigent had not the faintest recollection of it.

"Ah! but it all happened. And you—you were the only one that did not laugh. You picked up the box and wiped it with your handkerchief. You tried

to wipe the ribbons, too; but that only made matters worse. And then, when the others made fun of you, you put the box under your arm, and said you were going to carry it home for me. And so you did, though it made you late for your books; and besides, our house was out of bounds, and you risked a thrashing for it."

"I wonder if I got it?" murmured Colonel Baigent.

"I knew nothing about the school bounds at the time, or I should never have allowed you! And on the way you asked me if I had hurt myself in falling. I told you 'No'; but that was a fib, for my hip was growing weak even then. It's by reason of my hip that I have to lie here. But in those days there was no one else to take the dancing classes, and it would never have done to confess. And—and that was all. I only met you once after that—it was in the post-office at St. Swithun's, and you ran in to get a stamp. I was standing by the counter, weighing a letter; and you, being in a hurry, did not recognize me. But I asked the old postmistress your name. Do you remember her?"

"She knew everybody's name," said the colonel. "And so that was all?"

"That was all, except that my blessing has gone with you, sir, from that day. Man and boy it has gone with you."

"Ma'am, if I had guessed it, some weary days in India might have been less weary."

So they sat talking for a while; but, by degrees, the invalid's eyes had grown pre-occupied.

"Netta, dear," she asked at length, "do you think we might ask the colonel to honour us by sharing our Christmas dinner to-morrow?"

In that luckless moment Colonel Baigent glanced up, caught sight of Miss Netta's face, and saw that in it which made his own colour to the roots of his hair. Then he gave a gulp, and faced the situation like the brave man he was.

"Ma'am," he said gently, "you have taken me for a friend, and God knows, my friends are few enough. I am going to treat you as a very old friend, and to dismiss all tact. You will eat your Christmas dinner with me to-morrow, here, in this house."

On his way back to the hotel Colonel Baigent halted to stare up at the minster tower. So much of his life had been spent under the shadow of it!—and yet, of all his sowing, one small act alone, long forgotten, had taken root here and survived.

In his dreams next morning he heard the minster bell ringing for early service. In his dreams, for a stroke or two, the remembered note of it carried him

back to boyhood. Then he awoke with a start, and jumped out of bed.

Far up the hill the bugles from the barracks challenged the note of the bell. Over the muslin blind drawn halfway across his window the sun shone on a clear, frosty morning; and in the haze of it, as he dressed, his eyes rested, across the clustered roofs, on an angle of the minster tower, and beyond it on the hill with the quarry hewn in its side, and the clump of trees remembered of all who in boyhood have been sons of the city's famous school.

He dressed rapidly. The street below had not yet awakened to Christmas Day, and the colonel, with Christmas in his heart, felt eager as a messenger of good news.

An hour later, as he returned, all refreshed in soul, from the minster, he ran against the second waiter, blinking in the sunlight on the doorstep of the hotel, and looking as though he had slept in his evening suit.

"I want breakfast at once," said the colonel; "and for luncheon you may put me up a basket."

"There was to have been a cold turkey," said the waiter, "it being Christmas Day."

"Put in the turkey, then—the whole turkey, please—and two bottles of champagne. I'll take my luncheon out."

"Two bottles, sir, did I understand you to say?"

"Certainly. Two bottles."

"Which the amount for corkage is cruel," said the waiter as he delivered his order at the office. "My word, and what an appetite! But I done him an injustice in one respec'. He do seem to be every inch a gentleman."

So the waiter's verdict, after all, sounded much the same as Miss Lapenotière's. And the conclusion seems to be that you can not only say the same thing in different ways, but quite different things in identical words.

DOCTOR UNONIUS

I

"In all his life he never engaged in a law suit. Reader, try if you can go so far and be so good a man."

Thus concludes the epitaph of Doctor Unonius, upon a modest stone in the churchyard of Polpeor, in Cornwall, of which parish he was, during his life, the general friend, as his scientific reputation now abides its boast.

To those who knew him in life there is a gentle irony in the thought that while, during life, his scientific attainments earned him nothing but neglect, their recognition grows now proportionately as the man himself, his face and habit, the spruce black suit he wore, and the thousand small acts of kindness he did, fade out of memory. "Your late eminent fellow-parishioner, now these forty years with God,"—so the Bishop of the Diocese spoke the other day before unveiling a stained-glass window to that memory in Polpeor Church. The Bishop, you see, spoke of eternal life in terms of time—a habit with us all. If anything could be more certain than that, in whatever

bliss Doctor Unonius now inherits, forty years—or a thousand for that matter—count as one day, it is that throughout his life he detested stained-glass. Through this very window, indeed, now obscured *ad majorem gloriam Dei et in memoriam Johannis Unonii medicinæ doctoris*, he loved—for it faced his pew—to watch during sermon-time the blue sky, the clouds, the rooks at their business in the churchyard elms. He has even recorded (in an essay on "Visions" read before the Tregantick Literary and Scientific Society in the winter session of 1856) that once, awaking with a start in the middle of Parson Grylls's sermon, he distinctly saw suspended in these same elm-tops the image of an abnormally long pilot-fish (*naucrates ductor*) he had received from a fishing-boat overnight and left at home in his surgery mounted upon an apparatus of his own invention, ready to be sketched before dissection. *Piscium et summa genus hæsit ulmo* . . . for twenty seconds, rubbing his eyes, he stared at the apparition as it very slowly faded.

It is on his researches in ichthyology, his list (no short one) of discoveries, his patient classification of British Fishes, that his fame rests. "Why 'British'?" the reader may ask. "Have fishes, then, our nationalities?" The doctor liked to think so. He was a lover of his country, and for three years, while Napoleon threatened us with invasion, he had served as a second-lieutenant in that famous company, the East and

West Looe Volunteer Artillery, better known as the Looe Die-hards. Now, in times of peace, with Britain supreme upon the seas, he boldly claimed for her every fish found off these shores. A sturgeon, even, might not visit our coastal waters, however casual the occasion, without receiving the compliment of citizenship for himself and his tribe. Yet Doctor Unonius patiently tracked these creatures in their most distant migrations—"*motus et migrationes diligentissime indagavit*," says the mural tablet beneath the window. The three lights of the window represent (1) Jonah vomited by the Whale, (2) the Miraculous Draught of Fishes, and (3) St. Peter, John Dory and the stater.

Polpeor, you must know, is a fishing-haven on the south coast of Cornwall, famous during the Napoleonic Wars for its privateering, and for its smuggling scarcely less notorious down to the middle of the last century. The doctor's parents, though of small estate, had earned by these and more legitimate arts enough money to set them dreaming of eminence for their only child, and sent him up to London to Guy's Hospital, where he studied surgery under the renowned Mr. Astley Cooper. Having qualified himself in this and in medicine, he returned to his native home, which he never again left—save now and then for a holiday—until the day of his death.

Assiduous in visiting the sick, he found the real happiness of his life (one might almost say its real

business) in his scientific and literary recreations. The range and diversity of these may be gathered from a list of his published writings: "The Efficacy of Digitalis Applied to Scrofula," "On the Carpenter Bee (Apis Centuncularis)," "Domestic Usage and Economy in the Reign of Elizabeth," "A Reply to a Query on Singular Fishes," "The Fabulous Foundation of the Popedom" (abridged from Bernard), "Migratory Birds of the West of England," "God's Arrow against Atheism and Irreligion," "A Dissertation on the Mermaid," "Observations on the Natural History of the Chameleon," "Ditto on the Jewish and Christian Sabbath Days," "Ditto on Cider-making and the Cultivation of Apple Trees," "Contributions to a Classification of British Crustacea," "On Man as the Image of the Deity," "*Daulias Advena;* or, the Migrations of the Swallow Tribe." We select these from the output of one decade only. A little later the activity grows less miscellaneous, and he is drifting upon his *magnum opus*, as the titles indicate, "Some Particulars of Rare Fishes found in Cornwall," "An Account of a Fish nearly allied to Hemiranphus," "On the Occurrence of the Crustacean Scyllurus Arctus."

He would announce these strange visitors—*sepia biserialis*, for an instance—with no less eagerness than a journalist hails the advent of a foreign potentate. He had invented, as we have said, an apparatus on

which he mounted them, with a jet of salt water that played over their scales and kept fresh, as he maintained, the delicate hues he copied from his water-colour box; with what success let anybody judge who has studied the four great volumes wherein these drawings survive, reproduced by lithography, and published by subscription.

Immersed in these studies, Doctor Unonius found no leisure to think of matrimony; and his friends and neighbours often took occasion to deplore it, for he was an extremely personable man, fresh-coloured and hale, of clean and regular habits, and, moreover, kind-hearted to a fault. All Polpeor agreed that he needed a wife to look after him, to protect him from being robbed; and Polpeor (to do it justice) did not say this without knowledge. The good man could never be persuaded that Polpeor folk—*his* folk—were capable of doing him a wrong; but certain it is that learnedly as he wrote "On the Cultivation of Apple Trees," the fruit of his carefully tended standards and espaliers seldom arrived at his own table. They burgeoned, they bloomed; the blossom "pitched," as we say in the West; the fruit swelled, ripened, and then——

Garden shows were rarities in those days: but Tregarrick (Polpeor's nearest market town) boasted a Horticultural Society and an annual Exhibition. Whether from indolence or modesty Doctor Unonius never competed, but he seldom missed to visit the

show and to con the exhibits. The date was then, and is to this day, the Feast of St. Matthew, which falls on the twenty-first of September: and one year, on the morrow of St. Matthew's Feast, the doctor, gazing pensively over his orchard gate at a noble tree of fruit, remarked to his friend and next-door neighbour, Captain Minards, late of the merchant service—

"Do you know, Minards, I was at Tregarrick yesterday; and I think—yes, without vaunting, I really think that the best of my pearmains yonder would have stood a fair chance of the prize for Table Varieties."

"The prize?" grunted Captain Minards. "Don't you fret about that: you won it all right."

"Eh?" queried Doctor Unonius, wiping his spectacles.

"Ay," said Captain Minards, filling a pipe; "you won it, right enough."

"But——"

"There's no 'but' about it. And what vexes me," pursued Captain Minards, "is that the rascals don't even trouble to rob you neatly. See that branch broken, yonder."

"That's with the weight of the crop."

"Weight o' my fiddlestick! And the ground all strewed with short twigs!"

"The wind's doing."

"When you know the weather has been flat calm for a week past!"

"There's an extraordinary eddy just here, at the turn of the valley; I have often observed a puff of wind—you might almost call it a gust—spring up with no apparent reason."

"Well, you're a man of science," Captain Minards replied doggedly, "and if you tell me this puff o' wind carried your pearmains all the way to Tregarrick and entered 'em at the show under some other body's name, I'm bound to believe you. But I wonder you don't put it into a book. It's interestin' enough."

With this Parthian shot he departed. But two nights later he was awakened in his bedroom, which overlooked the doctor's orchard, by a strange rustling among the apple trees. *Thud—thud!*—there as he lay he listened for half a minute to the sounds of the dropping fruit.

The night was calm. . . . On the wall facing the bed's foot there hung an old gun. Captain Minards arose, reached it down, loaded it with a charge of powder, and, stepping to the window, let bang at the trees. . . . After listening awhile he replaced the gun and retired to rest.

Next morning Doctor Unonius was called away from his breakfast to visit Sarah Puckey, an aged market woman or "regrater," whom he found in a state of prostration following (it was alleged) upon a

severe nervous shock. He attended the old woman for the remainder of her days, which were few; and while they lasted she remained--in the language of Polpeor —a "bedrider." She never confided to him the nature of the shock which had laid her low; but at the last, satisfied of her own salvation, she worried herself sadly over the doctor and his defenceless life.

"I'm a saved woman," she declared, "and a dyin' old woman, and these things be clear to my eyes. A wife—that's what you want. Your laudanums and your doldadums and your nummy-dummies * may be all very well——"

"What are they?" asked the doctor.

"Latin," she answered promptly. "I be a dyin' woman, I tell 'ee, an' got the gift o' tongues. . . . And your 'natomies and fishes' innards may be all very well, but you want a wife to look after the money an' tell the men to wipe their sea-boots 'pon the front mat. When it comes to their unpickin' a trawl in your very drawin'-room, an' fish scales all over the best Brussels, as I've a-see'd 'em before now——" Mrs. Puckey paused for breath.

"Have 'ee ever had a mind to the widow Tresize?" she asked.

"Certainly not," the doctor answered.

"That's a pity, too: for Landeweddy Farm's her

* *Quære.* Was this some faint inherited memory of "the old profession"?—*In nomine domini, etc.*

own freehold, an' I've heard her say more'n once how sorry she feels for you, livin' alone as you do. I don't everyways like Missus Tresize, but she's a bowerly woman an' nimble for her age—which can't be forty, not by a year or two. Old Tresize married her for her looks. I mind goin' to the weddin', an' she brought en no more'n her clothes an' herself inside of 'em: an' now she've a-buried th' old doter, an' sits up at Landeweddy in her own parlour a-playin' the pianner with both hands. What d'ee reckon a woman does *that* for?"

"Maybe because she is fond of music," said Doctor Unonius, drily.

The invalid chuckled, until her old head in its white mob-cap nodded against the white pillow propping it.

"I married three men mysel' in my time, as you d' know; an' if either wan had been rich enough to leave me a pianner, I'd ha' married three more. . . . What tickles me is you men with your talk o' spoort. Catchin' fish for a business I can understand: you got to do that for money, which is the first thing in life; an' when you're married, the woman sees that you don't shirk it. But you make me laugh, puttin' on airs an' pretendin' to do it for spoort—'Wimmen ha'n't got no sense o' spoort,' says you, all solemn as owls. Soon as a boy turns fourteen he takes up the trick. 'Wimmen ha'n't got no sense o' spoort,' says

he, sticking his hands in his breeches pockets; an' off he goes to hook fish, an' comes swaggerin' back to be taken, catch an' all, by a young 'ooman that has been sayin' naught but markin' him down all the time. Spoort? This world, doctor, is made up of hooks an' eyes: an' you reckon—do 'ee—the best spoort goes to the hooks? Ask the eyes and the maidens that make 'em."

The doctor, who had risen and picked up his hat when Mrs. Puckey linked his name with the widow Tresize's, came back and re-seated himself by the bedside. The old woman enjoyed her chat—it did her more good than medicine, she said—and so long as she steered it clear of himself and his private affairs he was willing enough to indulge her. Nay, he too—being no prude—enjoyed her general disquisitions on matrimony and the sexes. *Homo sum, etc.*, . . . He was a great reader of Montaigne, and like Montaigne he loved listening to folks, however humble, who (as he put it) knew their subject. Mrs. Puckey certainly knew her subject, and if in experience she fell a little short of Chaucer's "Wife of Bath," she handled it with something of that lady's freedom, and, in detail, with a plainness of speech worthy of Panurge.

She knew very well that by further reference to Mrs. Tresize she risked cutting short the doctor's visit. Yet, woman-like, she could not forbear from just one more word.

"She keeps it under the bed."

"Keeps what?" asked Doctor Unonius.

The old woman chuckled again. "Why, her money, to be sure—hunderds an' hunderds o' pounds —in a great iron chest. I wonder she can sleep o' nights with it, up in that g'e'rt lonely house, an' not a man within call—— Aw, doctor dear, don't tell me you're *goin'!*"

II

A year passed; a year and three months. Old Mrs. Puckey was dead and laid in churchyard, and the doctor remained a bachelor. Christmas found him busy upon two papers written almost concurrently: the one "A Description of a Kind of Trigla vulgarly confounded with Trigla Blochii," intended for Loudon's "Magazine of Natural History," the other, "On Savagery in Dogs and Methods of Meeting their Attacks," for the *Journal* of the Royal Institution of Cornwall.

On the morning of St. Stephen's (or Boxing) Day, his professional visits over, he devoted an hour to the second of these treatises. He had reached this striking passage—

"Homer informs us that the fury of a dog in attacking

an approaching stranger is appeased by the man's sitting down :

> "'Soon as Ulysses near th' enclosure drew,
> With open mouths the furious mastiffs flew :
> Down sat the sage and, cautious to withstand,
> Let fall th' offensive truncheon from his hand.'
> POPE.

"Even at the present day this is a well-understood mode of defence, as will be seen from the following :

"At Argos one evening, at the table of General Gordon, then commander-in-chief in the Morea, the conversation happened to turn on the number and fierceness of Greek dogs, when one of the company remarked that he knew a very simple expedient for appeasing their fury. Happening on a journey to miss his road, and being overtaken with darkness, he sought refuge for the night at a pastoral settlement by the wayside. As he approached, the dogs rushed out upon him, and the consequences might have been serious had he not been rescued by an old shepherd, the Eumaeus of the fold, who sallied forth and, finding that the intruder was but a frightened traveller, after pelting off his assailants, gave him a hospitable reception in his hut. His guest made some remark on the watchfulness and zeal of his dogs, and on the danger to which he had been exposed in their attack. The old man replied that it was his own fault for not taking the customary precaution in such an emergency, that he ought to have stopped *and sat down*, until some person whom the animals knew came to protect him.

"As this expedient was new to the traveller he made some further inquiries, and was assured that if any person in such a predicament will simply seat himself on the ground, laying aside his weapons of defence, the dogs will also squat around in a circle; that as long as he remains

quiet they will follow his example, but as soon as he rises and moves forward they will renew the attack."

At this point the doctor laid down his pen, arose, and went to the book-case for his Homer, with purpose to copy the original lines into a footnote—for, to tell the truth, he had never quite mastered the methods of the Greek accents. He found the passage in Odyssey 14. Yes, it was all right—

αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
Ἔζετο κερδοσύνῃ, σκῆπτρον δὲ οἱ ἔκπεσε χειρός . . .

But—hallo! what was this next line?—

Ἔνθα κεν ᾧ παρὰ σταθμῷ ἀεικέλιον πάθεν ἄλγος . . .

—"There by his own steading," the poet went on, "would Odysseus have suffered foul hurt, had not the swineherd hurried out and scolded the dogs and pelted them off with stones." It would seem then, according to Homer, that this device of squatting upon the ground could not be trusted save as a diversion, a temporary check. Doctor Unonius bit his nether lip. Strange that he had overlooked this. . . .

He had a scholar's conscience. He could not endure to garble a quotation or suppress a material point for the sake of illustrating an argument more vividly. . . . Besides, it might delude some unfortunate person into sitting down where self-preservation

demanded a more alert posture. Somebody—dreadful thought!—might get himself severely bitten, mauled, mangled perhaps to death, merely by obeying a piece of pseudo-scientific advice. That he, Doctor Unonius, might never be reproached with the disaster, might never even hear of it, in no degree mitigated his responsibility.

While he stood by the bookcase, balancing his spectacles on his forefinger and Homer's words in his mind, Jenifer his one small maid-servant entered with word that Roger Olver was at the door with a message from Penalune.

"Show him in," said Doctor Unonius.

So Roger Olver, huntsman and handy-man to Sir John Penalune of Penalune, squire of Polpeor, hitched his horse's bridle on the staple by the doctor's front door—it would be hard to compute how many farmers, husbands, riding down at dead of night with news of wives in labour, had tethered their horses to that well-worn staple—and was conducted by Jenifer to the doctor's study.

"Ah! Good morning, Roger!"

"Mornin', y'r honour. Sir John bade me ride down an' ask 'ee——"

"To be sure—to be sure. As it happens, no man could have come at a happier moment. Accustomed, as you are, to dogs——"

"Hounds," corrected Roger.

"It makes no difference." The doctor translated the passage, and explained his difficulty.

"I reckon," said Roger, after scratching his head, "the gentleman acted right in settin' down—though I've never had occasion to try it, dogs bein' fond o' me by natur'. I've heard, too, that a very good way, when a dog goes for you, is to squatty 'pon your heels with your coat-tails breshin' the ground an' bust out laffin' in his face. I tell that for what 'tis worth."

"Thank you," said the doctor. "I will make a note of it."

"It wants nerve, seemin' to me." Roger Olver rubbed his chin.

"That is understood."

"For my part, if it happened I had a stick, I'd slash out at the beggar's fore legs—so—an' keep slashin' same as if I was mowin' grass. Or, if I hadn' a stick, I'd kick straight for his fore legs an' chest; he's easy to cripple there, an' he knows it. Settin' down may be all right for the time, only the difficulty is you've got to get up again sooner or later—onless help arrives."

"Eureka!" exclaimed Doctor Unonius, rushing to his notes.

"I beg y'r honour's pardon?"

"The modern instance says that the dogs would remain seated in a circle round the man; that so long

as he remained seated they would do the same; but that, if he attempted to rise, they would renew the attack. That vindicates me, and explains Homer."

"Do it?" said Roger Olver. "But, beggin' your pardon, sir, if it's about dogs you want to know, why not have a look in at the kennels—ay, an' follow the hounds now an' then? I've often wondered, makin' so bold, how a gentleman like yourself, an' knowin' what's good for health, can go wastin' time on dead fishes, with a pack o' hounds, so to speak, at your door."

"There's no sport more healthful, I verily believe," agreed the doctor.

"And as for nat'ral history, what can a man want that he can't larn off a fox? Five an' twenty years I've been at it, an' the varmints be teachin' me yet. But I'm forgettin' my message, sir, which is that Sir John sends his compliments and would be happy to see you at dinner this evenin', he havin' a few friends."

Doctor Unonius sighed. He had designed to spend the evening on his treatise. But he cherished a real regard for Sir John, whom all the countryside esteemed for a sportsman and an upright English gentleman; and Sir John, who, without learning of his own, held learning in exaggerated respect, cherished an equal regard for the doctor.

"My compliments to your master. I will come

with pleasure," said Doctor Unonius, thrusting Homer back in his shelf.

III

"Wunnerful brandy, Sir John!" said old Squire Morshead.

He said this regularly as he dined at Penalune when, after dinner and wine and songs, the hour came for the "brandy-mixing" before the guests dispersed. Sir John was a widower and confined his hospitality to men. He had adored his wife and lost her young; and thereafter, though exquisitely courteous to ladies when he met them—on the hunting-field, for example—he could not endure one within the walls of Penalune. As he put it to himself, quoting an old by-word, "What the eye don't see the heart don't grieve." It scarcely needs to be added that the heart *did* grieve; but this was his way, albeit a strange one, of worshipping what he had lost.

For the rest, he was a hale, cheerful, even jovial gentleman, now well past fifty; clear of eye, sound of wind and limb, standing six feet two in his stockings; fearing no man, on good terms with all, but liking his neighbours best, and no more eccentric than a country squire has the right, if not even the obligation to be. Unless it were in the saddle, you could scarcely

see him to better advantage than at this ceremony of brandy-mixing—for a ceremony it was; no pushing of a decanter, but a slow solemn ladling by the host himself from an ample bowl. Moreover, the Penalune brandy was famous.

"It has lain," said he—"let me see—thirty-five years in cellar, to my own knowledge. My father never told me how or when he came by it. Smuggled, you may be sure."

The talk ran on smuggling and its decline. A Mr. St. Aubyn, of Clowance, lamented this decline as symptomatic—"the national fibre's deteriorating, mark my words." A Mr. Trelawny was disposed to agree with him. "And, after all," he said, "the game was a venial one; a kind of sport. Hang it, a Briton must be allowed his sporting instincts!" "By the same argument, no doubt, you would justify poaching?" put in Sir John, with a twinkle. Mr. Trelawny would by no means allow this. "It would interest me, sir, to hear you define the moral difference between smuggling and poaching," said Doctor Unonius. "I don't go in for definitions, sir," Mr. Trelawny answered. "I'm a practical man and judge things by their results. Look at your Polpeor folk—smugglers all, or the sons of smugglers—a fine upstanding, independent lot as you would wish to see; whereas your poacher nine times out of ten is a sneak, and looks it." "Because," retorted the doctor, but

gently, "your smuggler lives in his own cottage, serves no master, and has public opinion—by which I mean the only public opinion he knows, that of his neighbours—to back him; whereas your poacher lives by day in affected subservience to the landowner he robs by night, and because you take good care that public opinion is against him." "To be sure I do," affirmed Mr. Trelawny, and would have continued the argument, but here old Squire Morshead struck in and damned the Government for its new coastguard service. "I don't deny," he said, "it's an improvement on anything we've seen yet under the Customs, or would be, if there was any real smuggling left to grapple with. But the 'trade' has been dwindling now for these thirty years, and to invent this fire-new service to suppress what's dying of its own accord is an infernal waste of public money." "I doubt," Sir John demurred, "if smuggling be quite so near death's door as you fancy. Hey, doctor—in Polpeor now?" The doctor opined that very little smuggling survived nowadays; the profits were not worth the risk. "Though, to be sure," he added, "public opinion in Polpeor is still with the trade. For an illustration, not a soul in the town will let the new coastguardsmen a house to live in, and I hear the Government intends to send down a hulk from Plymouth Dock and moor it alongside the quay." He paused. "But," he went on, with a glance over his spectacles at Sir

John, "our host, who owns two-thirds of the cottages in Polpeor, may correct me and say that Government never offered a fair rent?" Sir John threw back his head and laughed. "My heir, when he succeeds me," he said, "may start new industries in Polpeor; but I'll not build new houses to worry my sitting tenants."

It was now eleven o'clock, and by-and-by the company dispersed—which they did almost simultaneously and from the stable-yard, amid a tremendous clattering of hoofs, rumbling of wheels, calls of stablemen, "gee's" and "woa's," buttoning of overcoats, wrapping of throats in comforters, "good nights," and invitations to meet again. Sir John himself moved up and down in the throng, speeding his parting guests, criticising their horseflesh, offering an extra wrap to one, assuring himself that another had his pocket-flask charged for a long night ride.

In the press Doctor Unonius—whether because he never stinted a vail to the grooms, or because they felt a natural kindness for one who had brought their wives through confinement and ushered their children into the world; and anyway there was sense in standing well with a man who might at any time in this transitory world have to decide the important question of your living or dying—managed to get old Dapple harnessed in the gig, and the lamps lit, and to jog off with the earliest. The drive of Penalune extends for

a mile, and along it, ahead of him and behind him, the voices of his fellow-guests challenged one another in song, rising clear on the frosty air—

> "In the month of November, in the year 'fifty-two,
> Three jolly fox-hunters, all sons of the Blue,
> Sing fol-de-rol, lol-de-rol—"

Beyond the lodge gates came the high-road, and here half a dozen of the chorussers shouted good night, and rode away northward and by east in the teeth of the wind; but the greater number bowled along with the doctor south-west to the cross-roads under Barrow Down. There the Polpeor road struck off to the left, and, swinging into it, he found himself alone.

IV

The night was moonless but strewn with stars. A tonic north-east wind hummed over the high moors, and seemed to prick old Dapple, prescient of his own straw and rack, to his very best trot. It was a penetrating wind, too; but Doctor Unonius, wrapped in his frieze coat, with the famous Penalune brandy playing about the cockles of his heart, defied its chill. At this rate half an hour would bring him to the gate of Landeweddy Farm, under the lee of Four Barrows; and beyond Landeweddy, where the road plunged straight to Polpeor and the coast, he would reach

complete shelter. Let the wind blow from this quarter never so fiercely, in the steep lanes under the seaward edge of the moor a man could hear it screaming overhead and laugh at it, lighting his pipe.

The sound of hoofs and wheels died away down the westward road. Doctor Unonius, with face set for home, pursed his mouth and inaudibly whistled a tune—

"In the month of November, in the year 'fifty-two."

"Whoa there, Dapple! Steady! Why, what ails the horse?" For Dapple, as the gig turned a corner of road, on a sudden had shied violently, half reared, and come to a halt with a jerk that set the gig quivering, and had almost broken its shafts.

"Why, halloa!" exclaimed the doctor, peering forward.

To the right of the road, a little ahead of him, stood a woman. She had drawn aside, close to the hedge, doubtless to let them pass. The rays of the gig lamp fell full on her—a broad-shouldered woman of more than ordinary height. Over her head was flung a dark shawl, and her left hand held its edges tightly together at the throat. In her right she carried a leathern bag. This was as much as the doctor could see, for the shawl concealed her features. He could not recognize her at all, though he knew, or believed that he knew, everybody—man, woman, or

child—within a radius of ten miles. But Doctor Unonius was ever polite.

"Hey? Good evening, ma'am!" he sang out. "You startled the old horse a bit. I hope he has not frightened you?"

There was no answer.

"Can I offer you a lift, ma'am, if you're going my way? The hour is late, and the weather none too pleasant for tramping these high moors."

Still there was no answer.

"You needn't be afraid of Dapple," he assured her. "He'll stand still as a rock now, if you'll climb up."

"Thank you," she answered at last, with a hesitating step forward, and the voice was hoarse and constrained.

"Come round to the other side then. Here, give me your bag."

The woman crossed in front of Dapple—who backed a foot or so uneasily—came around to the step, and handed up her bag. It was a two-handled bag, of japanned leather, and Doctor Unonius, as he took it from her and rested it against the splashboard, noted also that it was exceedingly heavy. He held out his hand. The woman grasped it, and clambered up beside him.

He gave a sharp look at her and called to Dapple. The horse pulled himself together and broke into a

brisk trot, which continued for hard upon half a mile before either occupant of the gig broke silence.

For Doctor Unonius was considering. Though a student he was a man of considerable courage and cool-headed in emergency, as he was now not a little pleased to prove, for hitherto life had provided few emergencies to test him. But here was an emergency, and—at this time of night, and in this place—it looked to be an ugly one. He had to deal with a discovery, and the discovery was this.

The hand he had just gripped was no woman's at all, but the hand of a man.

He stole another glance at his companion. She, or he, was leaning forward in a huddled attitude to meet the wind which now, as they rounded an edge of the down, blew crosswise athwart the gig and a little ahead. Nothing of face could be seen, only—and this dimly by the starshine—the hand that grasped the shawl. But it was enough; a man's hand, the doctor could almost swear. He recognized this with a slight thrill. He was not afraid, but he was undeniably excited.

What on earth should a man be doing in woman's clothes, on this road and at this hour? The road led no whither but to Polpeor and the coast, and passed on its way no human habitation but Landeweddy Farm and a couple of cottages half a mile beyond it, close under the dip of the hill.

"You are shivering," said Doctor Unonius, after a pause.

The crouching figure nodded, but did not speak.

"Are you cold? Here, take some more of the rug."

For a moment there was no answer, then a shake of the head.

"Ill, then? Feverish? I am a doctor: let me feel your pulse."

His companion made a quick gesture as if to hide the hand grasping the gig-rail: but after another pause, and as if reluctantly, it was reached across. The other still clutched the shawl.

Doctor Unonius, drawing off his right-hand glove with his teeth, reached across also and laid his fingers in professional fashion on the wrist. Yes; he was right. The wrist was a man's wrist, large and bony. He screwed up his eyes and peered down as well as he might at the upturned hand. He could see that the finger-tips were square, and the palm, if he mistook not, showed a row of callosities at the base of the fingers. Something in the pulse's beat caught his attention, and almost at the same moment his nostrils expanded suspiciously. Doctor Unonius had a delicate sense of smell.

"This man," he thought, "is in a blue fright; and moreover, and although he smokes a deal of rank tobacco, I am open to bet he is a butcher by trade."

He relaxed the pressure of his fingers very slightly, and the hand was sharply withdrawn.

Almost at the same moment the doctor's own hand went swiftly to his head. There was a tug at the reins, and it fetched old Dapple up with a sprawl.

"My hat is gone!" exclaimed the doctor.

Sure enough it was: and as he leaned and peered after it, he could just discern it for a moment before it dropped like a sable bird against a dark furze bush a few yards away to the left.

"My hat is gone," he repeated.

His companion did not budge, hardly so much as turned a glance, but sat as before, shivering and dumb.

"I am very sorry to trouble you, ma'am," ventured the doctor, politely. "But would it inconvenience you very much to climb down and recover my hat? It lies yonder, against the furze. With one of the lamps you will find it easily."

"Can't you climb down yourself and fetch it? I'll hold the reins." The voice was husky, the tone ungracious.

"No, ma'am. Dapple is restive to-night, and I prefer—if you'll forgive me—not to trust him to a lady and a stranger. If you refuse, my hat must e'en remain where it lies."

The figure rose, as if upon a sudden resolve, and set one foot on the step.

"I'll fetch it for you. But being driven to-night is cold work, and I won't trouble you any further. Hand me down my bag, please."

The stranger climbed out and stood beside the step, with one hand holding on to the edge of the footboard.

"Come, hand me down my bag."

For answer Doctor Unonius lifted his foot and brought it down suddenly on the hand, grinding his heel into the fingers. At the same moment the whip-lash fell over Dapple's haunches. There was a yell of pain, a wild curse, a scuttering of hoofs, and the old horse, unaccustomed to the whip and well-nigh scared out of his senses, plunged forward into the night.

For a minute or so Doctor Unonius, as he called to Dapple and plied the whip, fancied that in the intervals of these encouragements he caught the sound of footsteps pursuing him down the hard road. But the chase, if chase were given, was vain from the first: for Dapple tore along as though the devil himself sat behind the splash-board.

But while the gig swayed and rocked, and while the wind sung past his ears, Doctor Unonius thrust a foot out, and steadying it against the hard bag, enjoyed some crowded moments of glorious life. After all these sedentary years adventure had swooped on him out of the night and was wafting him along in a sort of ecstasy. If the hand were, after all, a woman's, he could never

forgive himself. . . . But it was not: of that he felt sure. Complete success had crowned his simple manœuvre. He felt all the exhilaration of a born student who suddenly discovers he can be practical—the sort of exhilaration Cicero felt, to his surprise, in dealing with the conspiracy of Catiline, and never during the rest of his life forgot.

It was hard on Dapple, but the doctor urged him for a mile before his natural kind-heartedness reasserted itself and he reined up the good old horse, to breathe him.

Now was his time to have a look at the bag. He reached down and lifted it to his knees, and again its weight surprised him. "It will be locked, no doubt," said the doctor to himself, as he drew the off gig-lamp from its socket to light his inspection.

But no: the bag was fastened by an ordinary spring-catch, and, when he pressed this, fell open easily. He listened for a second or two, with a glance over his shoulder into the darkness behind. But nothing could be heard—nothing but the night-call of a curlew somewhere on the moor, far to his right. Holding the lamp a little higher in his left, he thrust his right hand into the bag, groped, and drew out—

First of all, a pistol, and whether loaded or not he deferred for the moment to examine.

Next, four small but heavy canvas bags, each tied about the neck with a leathern thong. By the

weight and the look, and also by the sound of them when shaken, they contained money.

Next, a pair of rubber-soled Blücher boots.

Next, a small square case, which he opened and found to contain a pocket-compass.

Next, a pair of night-glasses.

Next, a neck-comforter of knitted grey worsted.

And, lastly, a folded map.

While he made this inventory, Doctor Unonius kept Dapple at a standstill; for thus only was he secure of hearing the smallest sound on the road behind. But now he judged it prudent to put another half a mile at least between him and pursuit, and so, replacing the lamp and hastily repacking the bag—with all but the pistol, which he kept handy on the seat beside him, and the map, which he thrust into the breast of his great coat—he urged the old horse into a fresh trot, nor pulled up again until he came to the glimmering white gate of Landeweddy Farm.

The courtlege of Landeweddy was hedged with tamarisks, now leafless, and through these, above the wall's coping, the upper part of the house loomed an indistinct mass against the indigo-grey night. No light showed anywhere—as why should the widow Tresize or her maid Tryphena be awake at such an hour? The doctor would have required sharp eyes indeed to note, as he drew rein, that the blind of an upper window at the south-east corner had been drawn

aside an inch or so out of the perpendicular. Had he detected this, indeed, it would have meant no more than that the widow, awakened from her slumbers by the sound of wheels, had arisen to satisfy the curiosity natural to woman.

But Doctor Unonius, noting it not, drew forth the map from the breast of his great coat, unfolded it, and was proceeding to study it, again by help of the lamp. He recognized it at first glance for a map of the coast and country about Polpeor, and for this he was prepared; but the same glance showed him a slip of paper pinned to the map's left upper corner. The paper bore a scrawl in pencil, ill-written, but decipherable—

"*Mrs. Tresize at Landeweddy. 48. White gate, entrance back. By Celler. Mem. 1 large chest. To be handled quick and hidn in orch^d if necess^ry. Reported good money, but near. No help here but 1 serv^t maid.*"

Doctor Unonius stared at the paper, and from the paper lifted his eyes to stare at the black bulk of the farmhouse buildings, the stretch of roof, the tall chimneys looming above the tamarisks. But the close rays of the lamp dazzled his eyes, and he saw nothing —nothing but the white gate glimmering at the end of the courtlege wall. While he peered and blinked, memory recalled to him old Mrs. Puckey's tale of the money-chest kept by the widow Tresize beneath her bed.

Mischief was brewing, beyond a doubt. Precisely

what that mischief might be he could not determine. But somewhere behind him was a man—a stranger, dressed in woman's clothes—making at dead of night for a house occupied by two women only; for a house that held money. And this man had been carrying a bag which contained among other things a pistol, probably loaded, a pair of boots with rubber soles, a map, and a memorandum which said (and almost certainly with truth) that the house was unprotected save by one servant maid.

It was clear that he must call at once and give warning; that he must awaken the widow, at whatever cost to her nerves, and offer his protection. It might be that he had checkmated the ruffian and thrown him off his game. Very likely he had. A man with this evidence against him, and minus the pistol with which he had intended to do his infernal work, would —ten to one—be heading away from justice, and for dear life. Still, where so much was mystery, the doctor decided to take no risks. Whatever the event, his course of action—his only possible course—lay plain before him. Here of a sudden it occurred to Doctor Unonius that the man, though travelling alone, might be travelling to meet accomplices; and these accomplices might be hiding around and waiting, even at this moment.

He remembered that beyond the white gate a short farm-road led around to the back entrance of the

building. With this new suspicion of a conspiracy in his mind, it cost him no small effort of courage to dismount, pistol in hand, from the gig and push the white gate open.

It fell back, as he remembered later, on a well-oiled hinge, and he stood aside while old Dapple, doubtless greatly wondering, obeyed his call and dragged the gig through. This was a nervous moment, for now the doctor could not rid himself of the apprehension that eyes might be watching him from behind the hedge. He remembered, too, that the widow Tresize kept a couple of sheep dogs, notoriously savage ones. It was strange that they did not awake and give tongue.

On the thought of this, as Dapple drew the gig through the gateway, Doctor Unonius edged up close to the step. . . . It might be all very well for Odysseus to squat on the ground when attacked by the hounds of Enmaeus, but Odysseus had not the resource (perhaps better) of springing into a gig.

Idle precaution! The widow Tresize's dogs were peradventure caught napping. At all events, neither one nor the other uttered a sound. Doctor Unonius, wrenching a lamp from its socket, walked boldly forward at Dapple's bit and, coming to the back entrance by the midden-yard, knocked boldly.

V

To his surprise, within a few seconds a faint light shone through the chink by the door-jamb, and he heard a footstep coming down the passage. A bolt was withdrawn, very softly—the door opened—and Mrs. Tresize herself confronted him.

She stood just within the threshold, holding a lamp high: and its rays, while they fell full on the doctor, causing him to blink, crossed the rays of his gig-lamp which showed him that, late though the hour was, she had as yet made no preparations for going to bed, even to the extent of taking off her jewellery. The base of the lamp, as its flames flickered in the draught, cast a waving shadow over the widow's cap perched on her neatly coiled black tresses, and the same shadow danced across her jet-black eyes and left them staring at him, very bright and inquisitive. She wore a dress of stiff black silk with a somewhat coquettish apron; and about her neck a solid gold chain, thrice coiled, with a massive locket pendant at her bosom. Above the locket was fastened a large memorial brooch with a framework of gold, a face of crystal and, behind the crystal, a weeping willow designed in somebody's hair. Altogether the widow's attire and array suggested that she had recently dismissed, or was even now expecting, company.

"Doctor Unonius?"

"You may well be surprised, madam—at this hour——"

"I did not send for you."

"No, madam; and you will be surprised when you learn the reason of this call—surprised but not (I beg) alarmed. To begin with, I have a pistol here and can, at the worst, protect you."

"Protect me?"

"I had best tell you my story, which is a sufficiently extraordinary one. I have been dining at Penalune—nay, madam, do not misunderstand me: I am as sober as a judge. On my homeward road I overtook a suspicious character, and certain evidence I managed to wrest from him leaves little doubt that robbery is intended here to-night, as it has actually been achieved elsewhere. The man, I should tell you—a powerful fellow—was dressed in woman's apparel."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Tresize shortly, and called down the passage behind her—"Tryphena, come here!"

Without delay a middle-aged maid-servant appeared from a doorway that (as the doctor knew) led out of an inner kitchen. Two sheep dogs followed her growling, but at her command grew tractable and made no demonstration beyond running around the doctor and sniffing at his legs.

Tryphena, too—who, like her mistress, was fully dressed—betrayed no surprise. She had, in fact, been sent upstairs at the sound of wheels, and from behind

a curtain had recognized Doctor Unonius as he examined the paper by the light of his gig-lamp.

"Tryphena, here's Doctor Unonius, and he brings word we're to be robbed and murdered in our beds."

"The Lord preserve us!" said Tryphena.

"Amen," said Mrs. Tresize; "and meanwhile you'd best go and stable the horse while I hear particulars."

Tryphena slipped out into the yard, the sheep dogs following. The doctor would have helped her, but she took the lamp from his hand, replaced it in its socket and set about unharnessing without further to-do, coaxing Dapple the while to stand steady.

"Tryphena understands horses," said Mrs. Tresize. "Come indoors, please, and tell me all about it."

Doctor Unonius lifted out the incriminating bag and followed her along the passage. She paused at the door of the "best kitchen" and pushed it wide. He looked in upon a bare but not uncheerful room, where a clean wood fire blazed on an open hearth and over the fire a kettle sang cosily. Gun-racks lined the walls, and dressers laden with valuable china, and these were seasonably adorned with sprigs of holly, ivy, and fir. A kissing-bush, even, hung from the bacon-rack that crossed the ceiling, with many hams wrapped in bracken, a brace of pheasants, and a "neck" of harvest corn elaborately plaited: and almost directly beneath it stood a circular table with a lamp and a set of dominoes, the half of them laid

out in an unfinished game. The floor was of slate but strewn with rugs, some of rag-work others of badgers' skins. A tall clock ticked sedately in a corner. On one side of the chimney a weather-glass depended, on the other a warming-pan—symbols, as it were, of conjugal interests, male and female, drawing together by the hearth.

Doctor Unonius felt an unwonted glow at the sight of this interior. He could not but admire, too, the widow's self-possession. Instead of trembling and demanding explanations she suggested that a glass of hot brandy and water would do him no possible harm after his drive, and stepped to the corner cupboard without waiting for an answer. It was a piece of furniture of some value, lacquered over with Chinese figures in dusky gold. But the doctor's gaze travelled rather to the gun-racks. He counted a dozen firearms, antique but serviceable, and suggested that, with powder and shot, Landeweddy was capable of standing a pretty stiff siege.

"I keep but two of them loaded," said the widow, and indicated them—a large blunderbuss and a fowling-piece with an immensely long barrel; "but there's powder and three sizes of shot in the right-hand drawer, there, below the dresser. You can charge the others, if you've a mind."

"My warning would hardly seem to have impressed you, madam."

"Oh yes, it has," answered Mrs. Tresize, measuring out the brandy. "But you see, doctor, one gets accustomed to fears, living in this lonely place; and with a man as protector one feels as safe as with a regiment."

"You flatter my ability, I fear," said the doctor. "I will do my best, of course: but I ought to warn you that I am no expert with firearms."

"I can help you with the loading," said Mrs. Tresize. "But tell me the worst of the danger, please."

Doctor Unonius set the bag on the table, and unloaded its contents one by one while he told his story. The sight of the money-bags did not produce quite the thrill he had looked for, but she evinced a lively interest in the paper pinned to the map.

"*Mrs. Tresize at Landeweddy, 48,*" she read, holding it under the lamp, and slightly puckering her handsome brows.

"That doesn't flatter you, ma'am."

"Hey?" Mrs. Tresize looked up sharply. "You don't suppose that means my *age?*"

"I—er—fancied it might. It would be a guess, of course."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Tresize.

"It *is* nonsense," the doctor agreed. "The man was obviously misinformed."

"It doesn't refer to my age at all," said Mrs.

Tresize, positively. "It—it alludes to something quite different. I was barely nineteen when I married."

"If you can guess to what it alludes——"

"*Reported good money, but near*——" read the widow, paused, and uttered a liquid laugh. "Oh, I am glad you showed me this. We'll punish him for that, doctor, if he dares to turn up."

"If," echoed the doctor, with a glance at the gun-racks.

"I ought to go and warn Tryphena."

"Every moment may be precious," he agreed again, while she went to the chimney-place and fetched the now boiling kettle.

She mixed the drink and set it close before him, where he leaned pondering a pile of gold he had poured upon the table from one of the canvas bags. The steam mounting from the glass bedimmed his spectacles. He took them off to wipe them, and perceived that she was smiling. She bit her lip at being thus caught.

"I was thinking," she made haste to explain, "what a funny situation 'twould be if by any chance the man was innocent, and you'd driven off with money that honestly belonged to him."

"Honest men don't put on women's clothes to tramp the moors at night," Doctor Unonius objected.

"Well, I don't see that it mightn't happen. A man having this money to carry, and afraid of being

robbed, might put it to himself that rough characters —specially gipsies—often let a woman pass where they'd attack a man. Or suppose, now, the man *was* a gipsy?—he'd sold three horses, we'll say, at Tregarrick Christmas Fair, and was trudging it back to his camp somewhere on the moors. A gipsy would be the very man to hit on that kind of disguise, it being against his own principles to hurt any woman but his wife."

"This man was a butcher, ma'am, and no gipsy."

"O—oh!" cried the widow, with a little gasp. "How do you know?"

"Never mind how I know, ma'am. He was a butcher, right enough; and, on your hypothesis that I've committed highway robbery upon an innocent man, I'd like you to explain how he comes to be carrying about this paper. 'One large chest' he credits you with possessing; it is to be handled quickly and hidden in the orchard, if necessary—that is, I suppose, if he should be surprised; and to resist him you have nobody on the premises but your servant maid Tryphena. For what innocent purpose, pray, does he carry about this memorandum?"

"'Myes, I suppose you are right," Mrs. Tresize assented with a little sigh, and forthwith shifted the conversation. "But taste your brandy, please, and tell me how you like it—though, to be sure, it won't compare with Squire Peneluna's."

It was, nevertheless, good sound brandy, genuine juice of the grape, soft and well-matured. The doctor after a sip nodded his approval.

"I dare say, now," she went on, "you're accustomed to this sort of thing? I mean, you must pass a good many nights, year's end to year's end, in other folk's parlours. . . ." She broke off, and this time with a genuine sigh. "I used to wonder in days gone by, if ever you'd be sitting here. I used to picture you . . . and now it's for a robber you're waiting!" She ended with a laugh, yet turned her face away.

But either the doctor was nettled or his mind refused to be diverted by small talk from the business in hand. He somewhat curtly commanded Mrs. Tresize to indicate on the gun-rack the weapons her late husband had commonly used, and to find him powder and shot. For a moment she pouted her lips mutinously, but ended by obeying him, with a shrug of her handsome shoulders.

She stood watching him while he carefully loaded the weapons and rammed home the wads. It is possible that she had a mind to relent, and suggest his whiling the time away with a game of dominoes. At any rate she went so far as to hazard—with a glance at the ivory tablets, and another at the hearth and the elbow-chairs—that he would find the waiting tedious.

"Not if you can supply me with a book, ma'am,"

he answered, laying the two guns on the table, after sweeping the dominoes aside to make room for them.

Mrs. Tresize left the room and returned bearing a volume—Blair's "Grave." She understood (she said) that the doctor preferred serious reading.

"Among all the poets that ever wrote," said Doctor Unonius, blandly, "with the possible exception of Young, I have the greatest contempt for Blair. He has the one unpardonable fault (not the one mentioned by Horace, though he has that, too): he is dishonest. The finest passage in the "Grave" is impudently stolen from Dryden, and marred in the stealing. But I thank Heaven, ma'am, that I can read any printed matter; and when Blair disgusts me I can always take a satisfactory revenge by turning him into Latin Elegiacs; by turning him, so to speak, in his Grave," concluded the doctor, grimly.

This routed the lady, but she managed to get in the last word. "Well, I can't pretend to understand you and your learning," she answered tartly; "but since we seem to be thanking Heaven, I'll thank it that I have a fire lit in my bedroom. It's the room just overhead, and I'm going to ask Tryphena to sleep with me when she has put up the bolts. Or, maybe, we shall sit up there for a while and talk. But anyhow, we are light sleepers, the both of us, and if there's any trouble you have only to call. Good night."

"Good night, ma'am!" said Doctor Unonius, and

opened the door for her. Left alone, he went back to the table and began to turn the pages of Blair.

VI

Doctor Unonius had drawn the table close beside an elbow-chair to the right of the fireplace. The excuse he made to himself was that, with a bright fire burning, he could the better see to read by blending its blaze with the light of the lamp. But it may be conjectured that, having disposed himself thus comfortably, he indulged in a nap. A strange sound fetched him out of it with a bounce. He leapt to his feet, and stood for a moment stupidly rubbing his eyes. The fire had burnt itself low. Blair's "Grave" lay face-downward on the hearth-rug, whither it had slipped from his knee. The clock in the corner ticked at its same deliberate pace, but its hands pointed to twenty minutes past two.

What was the sound? Or, rather—since it no longer continued—what had it been? As it seemed to him, it had resembled the beat of horses' hoofs at a gallop; a stampede almost. It could not have gone past on the high-road, for the noise had never been loud: yet it seemed to come from the high-road for a while, and then to drop suddenly and be drawn out in a series of faint thudded echoes.

Doctor Unonius went to the window, drew the curtains, unbarred a shutter, and stared out into the night. A newly risen moon hung low in the south-east, just above the coping of the courtlage wall, but the wall with its shrubs and clumps of ivy, massed in blackest shadow, excluded all view of the terrestrial world. The sound, whatever it had been, was not repeated.

Doctor Unonius stood for half a minute or so and gazed out with his forehead pressed to the pane. Then he closed the shutter again, let fall the curtain, and with a slight shiver went back to the fireplace.

He had picked up a pair of tongs and was stooping to pick up the charred ends of wood and pile them to revive the blaze, when another sound fetched him upright again. This also was the sound of a horse at a gallop, but now it drew nearer and nearer up the road. It clattered past the courtlage wall, and with that came to a sudden sprawling halt. A man's voice, the rider's, shouted some two or three words the doctor could not catch; but a moment later he heard the latch of the yard-gate clink and horse and man lunge through, and had scarcely time to arm himself with one of the guns before three sharp strokes rattled on the back door.

Doctor Unonius hurried out to the passage. There he all but ran into Mrs. Tresize, who came downstairs

lamp in hand and fully dressed as before. As before, too, she was entirely composed in manner.

"I will open," she said. "Go back and put the other gun away quickly, the pistol too. Keep the one in your hand if you will, and come back to me while I pretend to draw the bolts. No, please don't argue. It will be all right if you do as I say."

She appeared so very sure of herself that, against his will, the doctor obeyed.

"*Pretend* to draw the bolts?" he kept muttering. Had the door been unbarred, then, all this while?

She was opening it, at any rate, when he returned to the passage. But before lifting the latch she demanded, as if upon second thought—

"Who is there? And what is your business?"

"Mr. Rattenbury," answered a loud voice. "You shall know my business fast enough if you will kindly open."

Without more ado she flung the door wide, and the ray of her lamp fell upon Mr. Rattenbury, the young riding-officer, cloaked, high-booted and spurred.

"A strange business it must be, sir," said the widow, "that brings you hammering up sick folk at this time of night!"

"Sick folk, eh?" said the riding-master, with a brusque laugh. "Sick folk don't usually sit up till past two in the morning ready dressed. Hadn't we better stow that kind of talk, ma'am?"

"You had better," Mrs. Tresize answered composedly, "hitch your horse's bridle to the staple you'll find on the left, and step inside—that is, if you are not in too great a hurry." Here she turned for a look behind her. "My goodness!" she cried with a well-feigned start, "if you haven't scared the doctor into fetching a gun!"

Mr. Rattenbury stared past her into the passage. "Doctor Unonius?" he exclaimed, catching his breath in surprise.

"At your good service, Mr. Rattenbury, though you have given us a shock, sir. May I ask what keeps you afoot to-night? Not a run of goods, I hope?"

Mr. Rattenbury stared at him. If any one man in the whole countryside bore a reputation of simple probity, it was Doctor Unonius. Impossible to connect him with tricks to defraud the Revenue! And yet had not the young riding-officer distinctly seen Landaveddy show and anon eclipse a light, and in such a fashion that it could only be interpreted as a signal.

"There has been a run, and an infernally daring one," said Mr. Rattenbury; "in Lealand Cove, not half an hour ago. And the deuce of it is we had warning of it all along."

"Warning?" echoed Mrs. Tresize, with a touch of anxiety in her voice.

"Yes, ma'am. It was known to us—though I'll not tell you how—that Truman, the Grampound butcher, was acting freighter for a pretty large run, and for a week now two of my fellows have been at Grampound keeping an eye on him. I sent over a relief this very afternoon, and the relieved men brought back the report that Truman had scarcely quitted his house for a week. They left at four o'clock. It was dusk, and he'd lit a couple of candles in his shop, and was seated there reading a newspaper. Another thing put us off. The boat chartered was the *Bold Venture*, with Cornelius Roose on board. Cornelius—as I dare say you've heard, doctor—is the cleverest spotsman on this coast; but he was never yet known to risk a run unless he had his brother John to help ashore. So we kept a sharp eye on John Roose, and unbeknown to him, as we thought. Well, to-night he attends a prayer-meeting at Polruan, that's five miles east of home, and starts back at ten o'clock, our men shadowing him all the way. Goes quietly to bed he does, and just as I'm thinking to do the same, be shot if Cornelius hasn't beaten up with a foul wind, dodged the cutter, and nipped into Lealand Cove, where somebody has two score of pack horses waiting——"

"Pack horses?"

"Yes, the old game. It hasn't been played before in my time, and my men had almost forgotten the

trick of it. The horses need training, you see, and we reckoned the trained ones had all died out."

"Horses?" repeated Doctor Unonius. "Then that accounts for the noise I heard——"

"Eh?" queried Mr. Rattenbury sharply.

"A sound of galloping, as it were. I opened the window to look, but could see nothing."

Mrs. Tresize caught her breath. "Yes, yes," she put in, "Doctor Unonius opened the window. You wouldn't charge *him* with making signals, I hope?"

"But——" began Doctor Unonius and Mr. Rattenbury together. The doctor was about to say that, the road being hidden from this downstairs window, it followed that the window could not be seen from the road. But the riding-officer had the louder voice and bore him down.

"But," he objected, "the light was shown from an *upstairs* window, ma'am."

"To be sure," the widow squared her chin and glanced at Doctor Unonius defiantly—"and what should the doctor be doing here except attending on the sick? And where should my poor maid Tryphena be lying at this moment but upstairs and in bed with the colic?"

The doctor, on a sudden confronted with this amazing lie, cast up his hands a little way, and so, averting his eyes, turned slowly round to the fireplace. His brain swam. For the moment he could

scarcely have been more helpless had some one dealt him a blow in the wind. His nature so abhorred falsehood that he blushed even to suspect it. To have it flung at him thus brazenly——

As he recovered his wits a little he heard the widow say—

"And as for the horses, they never came this way."

"Is that so?" Mr. Rattenbury swung round upon the doctor.

"They—they certainly did not pass along the road outside," said Doctor Unonius, speaking as in a dream. "The noise of galloping turned off at some distance below the house, and seemed to die away to the northward."

"Then I've made a cursed mess of this," said the riding-officer, snatching up his hat. "Your pardon, ma'am! and if you won't forgive me to-night, I'll call and apologize to-morrow."

VII

He was gone. They heard the clatter of his horse's hoofs down the road, and listened as it died away.

Neither spoke. Mrs. Tresize stood by the table, and so that, glancing sidewise across her left shoulder,

her eyes studied the doctor's back, which he kept obstinately turned upon her. He had put up a hand to the chimney-shelf and leaned forward with his gaze bent on the embers.

"Doctor?"

"Ma'am?" after a long pause.

"Do you really reckon smuggling so very sinful?"

"It is not a question of smuggling, ma'am."

"Oh yes, it is!" she insisted. "Once you get mixed up in that business you have to deceive at times—if 'tis only to protect others."

"I can understand, ma'am," said the doctor, after another pause, "that to dabble in smuggling is to court many awkward situations. You need not remind *me* of that, who am fresh from misleading that young man. It was—if you will pardon my saying so—by reason of his trust in my good faith that you escaped cross-questioning."

"I'll grant that, and with all my heart. But, since deceiving him goes so hard against the grain with you, he shall know the truth to-morrow, when he comes to apologize. Will that content you?"

"It will be some atonement, ma'am. As for contenting me——"

"You mean that I have given you a shock? And that to recover your esteem will not be easy?"

She asked it with a small, pathetic sigh, and took a step towards the fireplace, as if to entreat his pardon.

But before he could be aware of this his attention was claimed by a sound without. The latch of the back door was lifted with a click, and, almost before he could face about, steps were heard in the passage. The door of the best kitchen opened a foot or so, and through the aperture was thrust the head of Tryphena —of Tryphena, who by rights should be lying upstairs, victim of a colic.

"Missus!" announced Tryphena, in a hoarse whisper. "The kegs be stowed all right in the orchet —all the four dozen. But here's Butcher Truman, teasy as fire. Says he's been robbed o' fifty pounds on the way an' can't pay the carriers! An' the carriers be tappin' the stuff an' drinkin' what's left, an' neither to hold nor to bind but threat'nin' to cut the inside of en out—an' he's here, if you plaze, to know if so be you could lend a few pounds to satisfy 'em. I told en——"

"Show him in," commanded Mrs. Tresize, with a creditable hold on her voice; for, to tell the truth, she was half hysterical.

Tryphena withdrew, and pushed the strangest of figures through the doorway. Butcher Truman had discarded the shawl from his head and shoulders, or perchance it had been snatched away by the infuriated carriers. For expedition, too, he had caught up his feminine skirt and petticoat and twisted them and caught them about his waist with a leathern belt,

over which they hung in careless indecorous festoons, draping a pair of corduroy breeches. But he still wore a woman's bodice, though half the buttons were burst; and a sunbonnet, with strings still knotted about his throat, dangled at the back of his shoulders like a hood. He was a full-blooded man, slightly obese, with a villainous pair of eyes that blinked in the sudden lamplight. He was dangerous, too, between anger and terror. But Mrs. Tresize gave him no time.

"Ah, good evening, Mr. Truman! There has been some mistake, I hear; but it's by the greatest good luck you came to me. Here is your missing property, eh?" She smiled and held out the bag.

Butcher Truman stared at it. "Send I may never——" he began; and with that his gaze, travelling past the bag, fell on Doctor Unonius. "*You?*" he stuttered, clenching his thick fists. "*You?* . . . Oh, by ——, let me get at 'im!"

But Mrs. Tresize very deftly stepped in front of him as he came on menacing.

"If you are not a fool," she said sharply, "you will waste no time, but hurry along and pay the carriers. They, for their part, won't waste any time with neat brandy. In ten minutes or so they'll be wanting your blood in a bottle—and, if it's all the same to you, Mr. Truman, I'd rather they didn't start hunting you through these premises. What's more," she added, as

he hesitated, "the riding-officer was close on your track just now. You owe it to Doctor Unonius here, that he has overrun it."

The butcher clutched at his bag, and made as if to open it.

"You needn't trouble," Mrs. Tresize assured him sweetly. "Your money's good—and so will be mine when it comes to settling, for all that I'm reported 'near.' Good night!"

"Good night!" growled Butcher Truman, and lurched forth with his bag. The widow, staring after him, broke into a laugh.

"Tryphena," she said, "fetch the doctor's horse and harness him quick! We must get him out of this, good man. Are the tubs stowed?"

"All of 'em, missus. I counted the four dozen."

"Four dozen is forty-eight; and that, doctor"—she turned to him—"is not my age, by a very long way."

But when Dapple had been harnessed, and the doctor drove off (after looking at his watch and finding that it indicated ten minutes to four), Mrs. Tresize lingered at the back door a moment before ordering Tryphena to shut and bolt it.

"There was nothing else to do but lie," she said to herself, meditatively. "But, all the same, it's lost him for me."

VIII

So indeed it had. Doctor Unonius could not overlook a falsehood, and from that hour his thoughts never rested upon the widow Tresize as a desirable woman to wed.

But he had grave searchings of conscience on the part he had been made to play. Undoubtedly he had misled Mr. Rattenbury, and—all question of public honesty apart—had perhaps injured that young officer's chances of promotion.

The thought of it disturbed his sleep for weeks. In the end he decided to make a clean breast to Mr. Rattenbury, as between man and man; and encountering him one afternoon on the Lealand road, drew up old Dapple and made sign that he wished to speak.

"It's about Mrs. Tresize——" he began.

"You're heard, then?" said Mr. Rattenbury.

"Heard what?"

"Why, that I'm going to marry her."

"Oh!" said the doctor; and added after a pause, "My dear sir, I wish you joy."

"I don't feel that I deserve her," said Mr. Rattenbury, somewhat fatuously.

"Oh!" said the doctor again. "As for that——"

He did not conclude the sentence, but drove on in meditation.

It is to be supposed that with marriage the widow mended her ways. Certainly she can have dabbled no more in smuggling, and as certainly she had told the truth about her age. Thrice in the years that followed Doctor Unonius spent some hours of the night, waiting, in the best kitchen at Landeweddy; and Mrs. Rattenbury on neither of these occasions—so critical for herself—forgot to have him provided with a decanter of excellent brandy.

The doctor sipping at it and gazing over the rim of the glass at Mr. Rattenbury—nervous and distraught, as a good husband should be—on each occasion wondered how much he knew.

MUTUAL EXCHANGE, LIMITED

I

MILLIONAIRE though he was, Mr. Markham (*née* Markheim) never let a small opportunity slip. To be sure the enforced idleness of Atlantic crossing bored him and kept him restless; it affected him with malaise to think that for these five days, while the solitude of ocean swallowed him, men on either shore, with cables at their command, were using them to get rich on their own account—it might even be at his expense. The first day out from New York he had spent in his cabin, immersed in correspondence. Having dealt with this and exhausted it, on the second, third, and fourth days he found nothing to do. He never played cards; he eschewed all acquaintance with his fellow-men except in the way of business; he had no vanity, and to be stared at on the promenade deck because of the fame of his wealth merely annoyed him. On the other hand, he had not the smallest excuse to lock himself up in his stuffy state-room. He enjoyed fresh air, and had never been sea-sick in his life.

It was just habit—the habit of never letting a chance go, or the detail of a chance—that on the fourth morning carried him the length of the liner, to engage in talk with the fresh-coloured young third officer busy on the high deck forward.

"A young man, exposed as you are, ought to insure himself," said Mr. Markham.

The third officer—by name Dick Rendal—knew something of the inquisitiveness and idle ways of passengers. This was his fifth trip in the *Carnatic*. He took no truck in passengers beyond showing them the patient politeness enjoined by the Company's rules. He knew nothing of Mr. Markham, who dispensed with the services of a valet and dressed with a shabbiness only pardonable in the extremely rich. Mr. Markham, "the Insurance King," had arrayed himself this morning in grey flannel, with a reach-me-down overcoat, cloth cap, and carpet slippers that betrayed his flat, Jewish instep. Dick Rendal sized him up for an insurance tout; but behaved precisely as he would have behaved on better information. He refrained from ordering the intruder aft; but eyed him less than amiably—being young, keen on his ship, and just now keen on his job.

"I saw you yesterday," said Mr. Markham. (It had blown more than half a gale, and late in the afternoon three heavy seas had come aboard. The third officer at this moment was employed with

half a dozen seamen in repairing damages.) "I was watching. As I judged, it was the nicest miss you weren't overboard. Over and above employers' liability you should insure. The Hands Across Mutual Exchange—that's your office."

Mr. Markham leaned back, and put a hand up to his inner breast-pocket—it is uncertain whether for his cigar-case, or for some leaflet relating to the Hands Across.

"Take care, sir!" said the third officer sharply. "That stanchion——"

He called too late. The hand as it touched the breast-pocket, shot up and clawed at the air. With a voice that was less a cry than a startled grunt, Mr. Markham pitched backwards off the fore-deck into the sea.

The third officer stared for just a fraction of a second; ran, seized a life-belt as the liner's length went shooting past; and hurled it—with pretty good aim, too—almost before a man of his working party had time to raise the cry of "Man Overboard!" Before the alarm reached the bridge, he had kicked off his shoes; and the last sound in his ears as he dived was the ping of the bell ringing down to the engine-room—a thin note, infinitely distant, speaking out of an immense silence.

II

It was a beautifully clean dive; but in the flurry of the plunge the third officer forgot for an instant the right upward slant of the palms, and went a great way deeper than he had intended. By the time he rose to the surface the liner had slid by, and for a moment or two he saw nothing; for instinctively he came up facing aft, towards the spot where Mr. Markham had fallen, and the long sea running after yesterday's gale threw up a ridge that seemed to take minutes—though in fact it took but a few seconds—to sink and heave up the trough beyond. By-and-by a life-belt swam up into sight; then another—at least a dozen had been flung; and beyond these at length, on the climbing crest of the swell two hundred yards away, the head and shoulders of Mr. Markham. By great good luck the first life-belt had fallen within a few feet of him, and Mr. Markham had somehow managed to get within reach and clutch it—a highly creditable feat when it is considered that he was at best a poor swimmer, that the fall had knocked more than half the breath out of his body, that he had swallowed close on a pint of salt water, and that a heavy overcoat impeded his movements. But after this fair first effort Mr. Markham, as his clothes weighed him down, began—as

the phrase is—to make very bad weather of it. He made worse and worse weather of it as Dick Rendal covered the distance between them with a superlatively fine side-stroke, once or twice singing out to him to hold on, and keep a good heart. Mr. Markham, whether he heard or no, held on with great courage, and even coolness—up to a point. Then of a sudden his nerve deserted him. He loosed his hold of the life-belt, and struck out for his rescuer. Worse, as he sank in the effort and Dick gripped him, he closed and struggled. For half a minute Dick, shaking free of the embrace—and this only by striking him on the jaw and half stunning him as they rose on the crest of a swell—was able to grip him by the collar and drag him within reach of the life-belt. But here the demented man managed to wreath his legs and arms in another and more terrible hold. The pair of them were now cursing horribly, cursing whenever a wave left choking them, and allowed them to cough and sputter for breath. They fought as two men whose lives had pent up an unmitigable hate for this moment. They fought, neither losing his hold, as their strength ebbed, and the weight of their clothes dragged them lower. Dick Rendal's hand still clutched the cord of the life-belt, but both bodies were under water, fast locked, when the liner's boat at length reached the spot. They were hauled on board, as on a long-line you haul

a fish with a crab fastened upon him; and were laid in the stern-sheets, where their grip was with some difficulty loosened.

It may have happened in the struggle. Or again it may have happened when they were hoisted aboard and lay, for a minute or so, side by side on the deck. Both men were insensible; so far gone indeed that the doctor looked serious as he and his helpers began to induce artificial respiration.

The young third officer "came round" after five minutes of this; but, strangely enough, in the end he was found to be suffering from a severer shock than Mr. Markham, on whom the doctor operated for a full twenty minutes before a flutter of the eyelids rewarded him. They were carried away—the third officer, in a state of collapse, to his modest berth; Mr. Markham to his white-and-gold deck-cabin. On his way thither Mr. Markham protested cheerily that he saw no reason for all this fuss; he was as right now, or nearly as right, as the Bank.

III

"How's Rendal getting on?"

Captain Holditch, skipper of the *Carnatic*, put this question next morning to the doctor, and was somewhat surprised by the answer.

"Oh, Rendal's all right. That is to say, he will be all right. Just now he's suffering from shock. My advice—supposing, of course, you can spare him—is to pack him straightaway off to his people on a week's leave. In a week he'll be fit as a fiddle." The doctor paused and added, "'Wish I could feel as easy about the millionaire."

"Why, what's the matter with him? 'Struck me he pulled round wonderfully, once you'd brought him to. He talked as cheery as a grig."

"H'm—yes," said the doctor; "he has been talking like that ever since, only he hasn't been talking sense. Calls me names for keeping him in bed, and wants to get out and repair that stanchion. I told him it was mended. 'Nothing on earth is the matter with me,' he insisted, till I had to quiet him down with bromide. By the way, did you send off any account of the accident?"

"By wireless? No; I took rather particular pains to stop that—gets into the papers, only frightens the family and friends, who conclude things to be ten times worse than they are. Plenty of time at Southampton. Boat-express'll take him home ahead of the scare."

"Lives in Park Lane, doesn't he?—that big corner house like a game-pie? . . . Ye-es, you were thoughtful, as usual. . . . Only some one might have been down to the docks to meet him. 'Wish I knew his

doctor's address. Well, never mind—I'll fix him up so that he reaches Park Lane, anyway."

"He ought to do something for Rendal," mused Captain Holditch.

"He will, you bet, when his head is right—that's if a millionaire's head is ever right," added the doctor, who held radical opinions on the distribution of wealth.

The captain ignored this. He never talked politics even when ashore.

"As plucky a rescue as ever I witnessed," he answered the doctor. "Yes, of course I'll spare the lad. Slip a few clothes into his bag, and tell him he can get off by the first train. Oh, and by the way, you might ask him if he's all right for money; say he can draw on me if he wants any."

The doctor took his message down to Dick Rendal. "We're this moment passing Hurst Castle," he announced cheerfully, "and you may tumble out if you like. But first I'm to pack a few clothes for you; if you let me, I'll do it better than the steward. Shore-going clothes, my boy—where do you keep your cabin trunk? Eh? Suit-case, is it?—best leather, nickel locks—no, silver, as I'm a sinner! Hullo, my young friend!"—here the doctor looked up, mischief in his eye—"You never struck me as that sort of dude; and fathers and mothers don't fit their offspring out with silver locks to their suit-cases—or they've altered since my time. Well, you'll enjoy

your leave all the better; and give her my congratulations. The Old Man says you may get off as soon as we're docked, and stay home till you've recovered. I dare say it won't be long before you feel better," he wound up, with a glance at the suit-case.

"The Old Man? Yes—yes—Captain Holditch, of course," muttered Dick from his berth.

The doctor looked at him narrowly for a moment; but, when he spoke again, kept by intention the same easy rattling tone.

"Decent of him, eh?—Yes, and by the way, he asked me to tell you that, if you shouldn't happen to be flush of money just now, that needn't hinder you five minutes. He'll be your banker, and make it right with the Board."

Dick lay still for half a dozen seconds, as though the words took that time in reaching him. Then he let out a short laugh from somewhere high in his nose.

"My banker? Will he? Good Lord!"

"May be," said the doctor, drily; laying out a suit of mufti at the foot of the bed, "the Old Man and I belong to the same date. I've heard that youngsters save money nowadays. But when I was your age that sort of offer would have hit the mark nine times out of ten."

He delivered this as a parting shot. Dick, lying on his back and staring up at a knot in the woodwork

over his bunk, received it placidly. Probably he did not hear. His brow was corrugated in a frown, as though he were working out a sum or puzzling over some problem. The doctor closed the door softly, and some minutes later paid a visit to Mr. Markham, whom he found stretched on the couch of the white-and-gold deck-cabin, attired in a grey flannel sleeping-suit, and wrapped around the legs with a travelling rug of dubious hue.

"That's a good deal better," he said cheerfully, after an examination, in which, while seeming to be occupied with pulses and temperature, he paid particular attention to the pupils of Mr. Markham's eyes. "We are nosing up the Solent fast—did you know it? Ten minutes ought to see us in Southampton Water; and I suppose you will be wanting to catch the first train."

"I wonder," said Mr. Markham, vaguely, "if the Old Man will mind."

The doctor stared for a moment. "I think we may risk it," he said, after a pause; "though I confess that, last night, I was doubtful. Of course, if you're going to be met, it's right enough."

"Why should I be met?"

"Well, you see—I couldn't know, could I? Anyway, you ought to see your own doctor as soon as you get home. Perhaps, if you gave me his name, I might scribble a note to him, just to say what has

happened. Even big-wigs, you know, don't resent being helped with a little information."

Mr. Markham stared. "Lord!" said he, "you're talking as if I kept a tame doctor! Why, man, I've never been sick nor sorry since I went to school?"

"That's not hard to believe. I've ausculted you —sound as a bell, you are: constitution strong as a horse's. Still, a shock is a shock. You've a family doctor, I expect—some one you ring up when your liver goes wrong, and you want to be advised to go to Marienbad or some such place—I'd feel easier if I could shift the responsibility on to him."

Still Mr. Markham stared. "I've heard about enough of this shock to my system," said he at length. "But have it your own way. If you want me to recommend a doctor, my mother swears by an old boy in Craven Street, Strand. I don't know the number, but his name's Leadbetter, and he's death on croup."

"Craven Street? That's a trifle off Park Lane, isn't it?—Still, Leadbetter, you say? I'll get hold of the directory, look up his address, and drop him a note or two on the case by this evening's post."

* * * * *

A couple of hours later Mr. Markham and Dick Rendal almost rubbed shoulders in the crowd of passengers shaking hands with the ever polite Captain

Holditch, and bidding the *Carnatic* good-bye with the usual parting compliments; but in the hurry and bustle no one noted that the pair exchanged neither word nor look of recognition. The skipper gave Dick an honest clap on the shoulder. "Doctor's fixed you up, then? That's right. Make the best of your holiday, and I'll see that the Board does you justice," and with that, turned away for more hand-shaking. One small thing he did remark. When it came to Mr. Markham's turn, that gentleman, before extending a hand, lifted it to his forehead and gravely saluted. But great men—as Captain Holditch knew—have their eccentric ways.

Nor was it remarked, when the luggage came to be sorted out and put on board the boat express, that Dick's porter under his direction collected and wheeled off Mr. Markham's; while Mr. Markham picked up Dick's suit case, walked away with it unchallenged to a third-class smoking compartment and deposited it on the rack. There were three other passengers in the compartment. "Good Lord!" ejaculated one, as the millionaire stepped out to purchase an evening paper. "Isn't that Markham? Well!—and travelling third!" "Saving habit—second nature," said another. "That's the way to get rich, my boy."

Meanwhile Dick, having paid for four places, and thereby secured a first-class solitude, visited the

telegraph office, and shrank the few pounds in his pocket by sending a number of cablegrams.

On the journey up Mr. Markham took some annoyance from the glances of his fellow-passengers. They were furtive, almost reverential, and this could only be set down to his exploit of yesterday. He thanked Heaven they forbore to talk of it.

IV

In the back-parlour of a bookseller's shop, between the Strand and the Embankment, three persons sat at tea; the proprietor of the shop, a grey little man with round spectacles and bushy eyebrows, his wife, and a pretty girl of twenty or twenty-one. The girl apparently was a visitor, for she wore her hat, and her jacket lay across the arm of an old horsehair sofa that stood against the wall in the lamp's half shadow; and yet the grey little bookseller and his little Dresden-china wife very evidently made no stranger of her. They talked, all three, as members of a family talk, when contented and affectionate; at haphazard, taking one another for granted, not raising their voices.

The table was laid for a fourth; and by-and-by they heard him coming through the shop—in a hurry too. The old lady, always sensitive to the sound of her boy's footsteps, looked up almost in alarm, but the girl half rose from her chair, her eyes eager.

"I know," she said breathlessly. "Jim has heard——"

"Chrissy here? That's right." A young man broke into the room, and stood waving a newspaper. "The *Carnatic's* arrived—here it is under 'Stop Press'—I bought the paper as I came by Somerset House—'*Carnatic* arrived at Southampton 3.45 this afternoon. Her time from Sandy Hook, 5 days, 6 hours, 45 minutes.'"

"Then she hasn't broken the record this time, though Dick was positive she would," put in the old lady. During the last six months she had developed a craze for Atlantic records, and knew the performances of all the great liners by heart.

"You bad little mother!"—Jim wagged a forefinger at her. "You don't deserve to hear another word."

"Is there any more?"

"More? Just you listen to this—'Reports heroic rescue. Yesterday afternoon Mr. Markham, the famous Insurance King, accidentally fell overboard from fore deck, and was gallantly rescued by a young officer named Kendal'—you bet that's a misprint for Rendal—error in the wire, perhaps—we'll get a later edition after tea—'who leapt into the sea and swam to the sinking millionaire, supporting him until assistance arrived. Mr. Markham had by this afternoon recovered sufficiently to travel home by the Boat Express.' There, see for yourselves!"

Jim spread the newspaper on the table.

"But don't they say anything about Dick?" quavered the mother, fumbling with her glasses, while Miss Chrissy stared at the print with shining eyes.

"Dick's not a millionaire, mother—though it seems he has been supporting one—for a few minutes anyway. Well, Chrissy? how does that make you feel?"

"You see, my dear," said the little bookseller softly, addressing his wife, "if any harm had come to the boy, they would have reported it for certain."

They talked over the news while Jim ate his tea, and now and again interrupted with his mouth full; talked over it and speculated upon it in low, excited tones, which grew calmer by degrees. But still a warm flush showed on the cheeks of both the women, and the little bookseller found it necessary to take out his handkerchief at intervals and wipe his round spectacles.

He was wiping them perhaps for the twentieth time, and announcing that he must go and relieve his assistant in the shop, when the assistant's voice was heard uplifted close outside—as it seemed, in remonstrance with a customer.

"Hullo!" said the little bookseller, and was rising from his chair, when the door opened. A middle-aged, Jewish-looking man, wrapped to the

chin in a shabby ulster and carrying a suit-case, stood on the threshold, and regarded the little party.

"Mother!" cried Mr. Markham. "Chrissy!"

He set down the suit-case, and took two eager strides. Old Mrs. Rendal, the one immediately menaced, shrank back into Jim's arms as he started up with his throat working to bolt a mouthful of cake. Chrissy caught her breath.

"Who in thunder are you, sir?" demanded Jim. "Get out of this, unless you want to be thrown out!"

"Chrissy!" again appealed Mr. Markham, but in a fainter voice. He had come to a standstill, and his hand went slowly up to his forehead.

Chrissy pointed to the suit-case. "It's—it's Dick's!" she gasped. Jim did not hear.

"Mr. Wenham," he said to the white-faced assistant in the doorway, "will you step out, please, and fetch a policeman?"

"Excuse me." Mr. Markham took his hand slowly from his face, and spread it behind him, groping as he stepped backwards to the door. "I—I am not well, I think"—he spoke precisely, as though each word as it came had to be held and gripped. "The address"—here he turned on Chrissy with a vague, apologetic smile—"faces—clear in my head. Mistake—I really beg your pardon."

"Get him some brandy, Jim," said the little bookseller. "The gentleman is ill, whoever he is."

But Mr. Markham turned without another word, and lurched past the assistant, who flattened himself against a bookshelf to give him room. Jim followed him through the shop; saw him cross the doorstep and turn away down the pavement to the left; stared in his wake until the darkness and the traffic swallowed him; and returned, softly whistling to the little parlour.

"Drunk's the simplest explanation," he announced.

"But how did he know my name?" demanded Chrissy. "And the suit-case!"

"Eh?" He's left it—well, if this doesn't beat the band! Here, Wenham—nip after the man and tell him he left his luggage behind!" Jim stooped to lift the case by the handle.

"But it's Dick's!"

"Dick's?"

"It's the suit-case I gave him—my birthday present last April. See, there are his initials!"

V

Dick Rendal, alighting at Waterloo, collected his luggage—or rather, Mr. Markham's—methodically; saw it hoisted on a four-wheeler; and, handing the cabby two shillings, told him to deliver it at an address in Park Lane, where the butler would pay him his exact fare. This done, he sought the

telegraph office and sent three more cablegrams, the concise wording of which he had carefully evolved on the way up from Southampton. These do not come into the story,—which may digress, however, so far as to tell that on receipt of one of them, the Vice-President of the Hands Across Central New York Office remarked to his secretary 'that the old warrior was losing no time. Leisure and ozone would appear to have bucked him up.' To which the secretary answered that it was lucky for civilization if Mr. Markham missed suspecting, or he'd infallibly make a corner in both.

Having despatched his orders, Dick Rendal felt in his pockets for a cigar-case; was annoyed and amused (in a sub-conscious sort of way) to find only a briar pipe and a pocketful of coarse-cut tobacco; filled and lit his pipe, and started to walk.

His way led him across Westminster Bridge, up through Whitehall, and brought him to the steps of that building which, among all the great London clubs, most exorbitantly resembles a palace. He mounted its perron with the springy confident step of youth; and that same spring and confidence of gait carried him past the usually vigilant porter. A marble staircase led him to the lordliest smoking-room in London. He frowned, perceiving that his favourite armchair was occupied by a somnolent Judge of the High Court, and catching up the *Revue*

des Deux Mondes settled himself in a window-bay commanding the great twilit square of the Horse Guards and the lamp-lit Mall.

He had entered the smoking-room lightly, almost jauntily; but—not a doubt of it—he was tired—so tired that he shuffled his body twice and thrice in the armchair before discovering the precise angle that gave superlative comfort. . . .

"I beg your pardon, sir."

Dick opened his eyes. A liveried footman stood over his chair, and was addressing him.

"Eh? Did I ring? Yes, you may bring me a glass of liqueur brandy. As quickly as possible, if you please; to tell the truth, George, I'm not feeling very well."

The man started at hearing his name, but made no motion to obey the order.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but the secretary wishes to see you in his room."

"The secretary? Mr. Hood? Yes, certainly." Dick rose. "I—I am afraid you must give me your arm, please. A giddiness—the ship's motion, I suppose."

The secretary was standing at his door in the great vestibule as Dick came down the staircase on the man's arm.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but may I have your name? The porter does not recognize you, and I fear that I am equally at fault."

"My name?"—with the same gesture that Mr. Markham had used in the little back parlour, Dick passed a hand over his eyes. He laughed, and even to his own ears the laugh sounded vacant, foolish.

"Are you a member of the club, sir?"

"I—I thought I was." The marble pillars of the atrium were swaying about him like painted cloths, the tesselated pavement heaving and rocking at his feet. "Abominably stupid of me," he muttered, "unpardonable, you must think."

The secretary looked at him narrowly, and decided that he was really ill; that there was nothing in his face to suggest the impostor.

"Come into my room for a moment," he said, and send the footman upstairs to make sure that no small property of the Club was missing. "Here, drink down the brandy. . . . Feeling better? You are aware, no doubt, that I might call in the police and have you searched?"

For a moment Dick did not answer, but stood staring with rigid eyes. At length—

"They—won't — find — what — I — want," he said slowly, dropping out the words one by one. The secretary now felt certain that here was a genuine case of mental derangement. With such he had no desire to be troubled; and so, the footman bringing word that nothing had been stolen, he dismissed Dick to the street.

VI

The brandy steadying him, Dick went down the steps with a fairly firm tread. But he went down into a world that for him was all darkness—darkness of chaos —carrying an entity that was not his, but belonged Heaven knew to whom.

The streets, the traffic, meant nothing to him. Their roar was within his head; and on his ears, nostrils, chest, lay a pressure as of mighty waters. Rapidly as he walked, he felt himself all the while to be lying fathoms deep in those waters, face downwards, with drooped head, held motionless there while something within him struggled impotently to rise to the surface. The weight that held him down, almost to bursting, was as the weight of tons.

The houses, the shop-fronts, the street-lamps, the throng of dark figures, passed him in unmeaning procession. Yet all the time his feet, by some instinct, were leading him towards the water; and by-and-by he found himself staring—still face-downwards—into a black inverted heaven wherein the lights had become stars and swayed only a little.

He had, in fact, halted, and was leaning over the parapet of the Embankment, a few yards from Cleopatra's Needle; and as he passed the plinth some

impression of it must have bitten itself on the retina; for coiled among the stars lay two motionless sphinxes green-eyed, with sheathed claws, watching lazily while the pressure bore him down to them, and down—and still down . . .

Upon this dome of night there broke the echo of a footfall. A thousand footsteps had passed him, and he had heard none of them. But this one, springing out of nowhere, sang and repeated itself and re-echoed across the dome, and from edge to edge. Dick's fingers drew themselves up like the claws of the sphinx. The footsteps drew nearer while he crouched: they were close to him. Dick leapt at them, with murder in his spring.

Where the two men grappled, the parapet of the Embankment opens on a flight of river-stairs. Mr. Markham had uttered no cry; nor did a sound escape either man as, locked in that wrestle, they swayed over the brink.

* * * * *

They were hauled up, unconscious, still locked in each other's arms.

"Queer business," said one of the rescuers as he helped to loosen their clasp, and lift the bodies on board the Royal Humane Society's float. Looks like murderous assault. But which of 'em done it by the looks, now?"

* * * * *

Five minutes later Dick's eyelids fluttered. For a moment he stared up at the dingy lamp swinging overhead; then his lips parted in a cry, faint, yet sharp—

"Take care, sir! That stanchion——"

But Mr. Markham's first words were, "Plucky! devilish plucky!—owe you my life, my lad."

THE END

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EXTRACT FROM PAGE 180.

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